



## **Newsletter October 2008**

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### **1. Have your say**



I would love to hear your experiences about how you as a dyslexic individual have coped either at school or in the workplace.

Do those you come into contact with know that you're dyslexic?  
Do others treat your difficulties with respect or do you feel they see you as someone who has 'problems'.

My experience is that most people don't really believe that I have dyslexia. They can clearly see that I have difficulties with the written word and although they don't say it to my face I can tell that they think I must be thick or was lazy at school and still can't be bothered to up skill myself with the basics of grammar and spelling. Luckily for me I have grown another skin and put it down to their ignorance rather than mine.

For some dyslexic individuals this attitude really eats away at their self-esteem and some have learnt avoidance strategies. Sadly, this could mean that they are not reaching their full potential, missing great opportunities or it might be affecting their relationships. Through

continually suppressing the person that you know you could be and doing the things that you might aspire to you are at risk of always feeling dissatisfied, frustrated, often angry and even depressed.

How do you get around this issue? I would love to hear how you are tackling it and what you would say others to help them tackle their insecurities.

Parents should be on the look out for signs of failing confidence in their dyslexic children and find ways to boost self-esteem by continually pointing out through praise and positive feedback on the tasks and activities that they have performed well, pinpointing the exact parts of the task that were particularly good and why. This might sound superficial but what it actually does is underline for the child what they can do, why it worked well doing it that way - this teaches the child to identify successful strategies that they can then apply to other tasks. This empowers them to be independent learners in all things, showing them that they 'can' rather than 'can't' be successful no matter what it is they are trying to achieve.

This process is an excellent way for dyslexic adults to review their own way of working. When we deconstruct the tasks that we do and critically review how we achieve it, this gives us vital clues as to how we work and how we learn. By identifying what we do well and how, we can then apply these successful strategies to the weakest areas of our performance. This process can sometimes be difficult to achieve on our own and it might be more productive if you are able to sit

down with someone who knows you very well to go through a step by step review of a particular task in hand or, if time permits, a more general study of your workload. This is a time consuming process to begin with but it really can be the key to unlocking your talents by enabling you to work to your strengths. This process affords you the opportunity to learn how good you are and how you can apply successful strategies to become even better. Email me with your experiences: [vicki@dyslexia-awareness-uk.com](mailto:vicki@dyslexia-awareness-uk.com)



## 2. Teachers

Children love to play games and can learn more through the process than any other method. It is often the case that children with specific learning difficulties, dyslexia receive additional support from the LSA/TA. Those who have received training in teaching SpLD's are very creative in their methods of teaching reading, writing, spelling and numeracy. I have witnessed some brilliant, fun, tactile and practical examples of teaching practice where the child perceives they are involved with playing a game rather than the onerous business of learning - for them the process of learning has only taught them that it is hard despite their best efforts, exhausting because of the practice they have to do and unrewarding

because the experience highlights their failings rather than their talents.

I specialise in teaching children with specific learning difficulties, dyslexia. Multi-sensory teaching is not only good for learners with specific difficulties but also good for all children. When running my dyslexia awareness workshops for teachers many of them are anxious about the time it would take them to develop lesson plans and resources and believe that somehow they cannot fit it into their schedule or that it would distract them and their learners from achieving the curriculum and related targets. However, what I have learnt is that this method of teaching enables all learners to surpass expectation in their attainment levels.

Good multi-sensory teaching works to the learners strengths whilst exercising their weaknesses. All learners engage with the process making classroom practice easier, more satisfying and fulfilling for the teaching practitioner. Good teachers will instinctively know that if a child is not learning through the way that they teach they will have to teach the child the way that they learn. Equally, they will be aware that if learning can be tailored within areas of the child's interest the more motivated a learner the child will be.

The British Dyslexia Association ran a project in Wales in conjunction with the Discovery Centre with a cohort of young people who had been refused further help by all other agencies due to their behaviour and attitude. This project demonstrates how it is possible to engage, even the most



disenfranchised, young people when the material and resources being used are relevant to them, the



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the experience is positive and rewarding. This project is an exemplar of accelerated learning through the knowledge and understanding of learning and working styles.

In a mainstream setting the target audience is somewhat different but the objective is to enable children to access learning, the same principals were applied to the BDA's project but the significant differences were the materials, resources and teaching practice. On the whole the young people were working with material and resources that they could relate to and were interested in.



With a clever piece of software available from ClaroRead one young man was able to learn how to read and write solely using material from the Liverpool

football club website – the software produced worksheets enabling the young man to learn all of the high frequency words used in the English language so that he could recognise and read them by sight automatically. This reduced the amount of processing required of his brain to enable him to

use the spare processing capacity of his brain to decode the remaining words in the text. His ability to recognise unfamiliar words grew rapidly because he was taught how words 'worked'. He was able to recognise letters and sounds, taught to read the first few letters and the last letter and in context of the sentence predict the meaning. Whilst, this is not a foolproof method of reading and comprehension it enabled this young man to recognise in himself the ability to read, which in turn because of his interest in the subject matter enhanced his motivation to read. His reading accuracy improved because of the software's ability to read the text as he attempted to read it for himself. This allowed him to pick up on any errors that he was making and consolidated his own knowledge as he went along.



Young children respond equally well when taught through the medium of play. I have noticed how teachers trained in SpLD's

frequently involve their learners in board games, role play and drama using the subject matter of the curriculum yet utilising a very informal method of teaching to get across complex concepts or confusing rules.

One teacher I observed recently used the preparation and cooking of an omelette to teach a dyscalculic child the language of maths - subtracting the

yolk from the egg white, adding salt and pepper a fraction of the weight of the whole with the conclusion being a delicious and nutritious meal. By this subliminal method of teaching the reluctant child effortlessly learnt some key mathematical points - when I spoke with the child prior to the cookery/maths language lesson her answer to nearly every question I asked was 'I can't do that miss'. Talking to the same child after the lesson her demeanour had completely changed, she appeared taller and much happier as if a big weight had been removed from her shoulders. She smiled and spoke confidently about what she had learnt and kept repeating 'I get it, I really get it!'

Play therapists have long known about the power of playtime and I am delighted to see how this is now becoming part of the mainstream classroom practice in some schools. We have a long way to go but if you would like a copy of my information sheet on what games to play with your learners, what learning objectives will be achieved, the resources you will need and how to play the games to best affect then please email me: [vicki@dyslexia-awareness-uk.com](mailto:vicki@dyslexia-awareness-uk.com)

### 3. Parent Power

As a parent do you realise that you could be holding the key to your child's academic success?

Every parent wishes the best for their child, especially in the classroom - we want our children to be the best they can be, to try hard and achieve the rewards that hard work and a determined spirit brings. How often have you heard the words 'try your

best' or 'just do the best that you can'. How can we be sure that your child is receiving the best possible support in school that is enabling rather than crushing?

What we often don't realise as parents is that we hold vital information on our child, clues as to what is going on within the child that is either a cause or barrier to that child's learning. However, parents need to be given the vital information to enable them to observe, record and report to educationalists in their effort to ensure their child is receiving the best possible support.



Teachers need to be trained in dyslexia awareness so that they can ask the right questions and apply appropriate teaching techniques. If all teachers taught in a dyslexia friendly way then mild to moderately dyslexic children would be able to access the curriculum with only minimal support. However, for the moment, only a very few teachers teach in this way, this is a result of the way in which they were taught to teach rather than any other reason.

It is a fact that teachers will teach to their own learning style rather than to the style of the learners in their

classroom. This means that possibly two thirds of the learners in their class will be working to their weaknesses rather than their strengths. I believe, through my experience, that teachers themselves get frustrated and disappointed with the results they achieve positively recognising that some children within their class should and could have achieved higher grades. This can occur irrespective of their best efforts; sadly it is simply their inability to recognise that their teaching style is where the difficulties lie.



So, what can parents do? If your child is having difficulties in acquiring literacy skills in school and you believe that they are not getting the support that they need then it is crucial for you to take action. It is your right as a parent to see your child's individual educational plan (IEP). Be prepared with a list of questions; ask for the IEP to be clarified if you are not clear about any part of it. What you need to know is: Have the child's difficulties been recognised? If so, what are they? What interventions have been put in place? How they are going to be monitored and what the time scale is.

Every child with a learning difficulty is entitled to appropriate support and as parents we need to be sure that this is in place. The Government has

allocated specific funds especially to help schools provide support to children with specific learning difficulties, dyslexia. It is incumbent upon Local Education Authorities (LEA), schools, teachers and other agencies to provide children with specific learning difficulties, e.g. dyslexia, the Education Act 1993/1996 and SEN Code of Practice 1994 clearly states that Teachers and Schools have statutory duties and responsibilities to identify and assess a child with special educational needs as soon as possible. (Ott 1997).

In order for a teacher to identify whether your child has a specific learning difficulty, dyslexia they have to do some checks and measures. There are a number of specific tests that can be used to determine what the difficulties are and the area of need for intervention. The child's eye-sight and hearing should be tested to discount any impairment.

If it is recognised that you child is at risk of having a specific learning difficulty (SpLD), dyslexia - the child should be referred to the SENCO who is normally the frontline practitioner who will test and recommend the necessary interventions to be put in place. However, it is worth noting that not all SENCO's are specialist dyslexia teachers and therefore they might adopt a trial and error strategy to the interventions they recommend - this approach can have a negative affect on the child because they do not progress at sufficient speed for the extra effort they are required to put in to their learning for it to be rewarding and thus they become disheartened and gain a sense of learned

helplessness rather than a determination to keep trying.



In fact it is well before school age that children begin to demonstrate signs of dyslexia, health visitors should be trained in identifying the signs of dyslexia so that they can monitor a child's progress in early years and provide the child's school with a checklist of milestones gained and what age and report on any speech and language delay as this is known to be one of the early clues as to whether the child will go on to acquire good literacy skills in school. (Bishop and Adams, 1990 as cited in Ott, 1997). Currently, parents are best placed to observe and record this information. "Those who have round the clock experience of living with dyslexic children often form a very different view of their skills than do researchers - or other practitioners (Nicholson and Fawcett, 1994, cited in Ott, 1997).

Dyslexia is a genetic condition, two in three dyslexic individuals inherit it from a parent, and one in three acquires the condition either through a stroke or head trauma. The latter could be sustained through a difficult birth (forceps delivery for example). It is believed that there is a higher

incidence of males being dyslexic than females. If either parent is dyslexic the child, therefore has a much greater chance of being dyslexic than if they are not. However, because there were no formal assessments prior to the mid 70's parents maybe unaware of their own condition.

To establish whether dyslexia is 'in the family' review the learning history of parents, their parents and their siblings. Usually you will be able to identify learning difficulties and possibly discover that in spite of problems at school the relative will have gone on to become successful in their chosen career. Relate difficulties in school and career choice as this could be a clue - dyslexic individuals historically tend to opt for more 'hands on' professions such as carpentry, mechanics, engineering or nursing, or they are attracted to people industries such as tourism, marketing or training. At the top end of scale you will find many architects and entrepreneurs are dyslexic but at the lower end of the scale many dyslexics find themselves becoming lorry/bus/train drivers, waiters, grounds men, or factory workers.

Dyslexic individuals are very right brained; they have a tendency to be great problem solvers, articulate and excellent lateral thinkers. Dyslexia occurs irrespective of intelligence, it is a 24/7 condition, no two dyslexics are alike and there is no cure, but with the right coping strategies individuals can overcome the barriers.

A vital clue to a specific learning difficulty being present is the acquisition of speech and language in

early years there is a body of evidence from research such as Bishop and Adams (1990) who found “syntax development (measured by receptive syntax and mean length of utterance expressed) was a particularly sensitive measure of later literacy performance.... If the language problems persisted beyond the age of five to six years, then literacy difficulties developed”.



Dyslexia also affects our motor skills for example our ability to ride a bicycle, learn to swim or play sports. In early years a child will experience difficulties in

threading beads, posting shaped bricks into the same shaped hole, climbing stairs and they may omit the stage of crawling completely, moving straight from shuffling on their bottom to walking.

A dyslexic child may not have reached these familiar milestones at the same age as their siblings or peer group but can and do go on to reach them at a later age, which is reassuring. If at this stage parents were made aware that these might be vital signs of a specific learning difficulty being present and taught about what they could do help their child at this early age, the child would have a much greater chance of acquiring literacy skills later. By simply beginning the process of engaging the child in rhyme, rhythm and alliteration would make a difference or exposing the child to the written word through reading to them from books and story telling - all activities that young children enjoy but we do not appear to involve

our children in these pastimes as much as we used to twenty years ago.

I have produced a questionnaire for parents to enable them to review their child's early history. As part of the process of identifying specific learning difficulties, dyslexia - this questionnaire might alert or confirm for the SENCO to the condition being present and what appropriate steps to take in helping the child overcome the areas of weakness. Download the questionnaire from my website <http://www.dyslexia-awareness-uk.com/>, fill in as many of the questions as you possibly can, giving more detail on a separate sheet if space is not available and take this to the school's special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO). Ideally, you should ask for a meeting with the SENCO, Head Teacher and classroom teacher where you should ask to see the child's IEP, don't be afraid to ask for clarity on anything that you are not sure about. Any intervention put in place must have a learning objective and expected outcome and this should be related to a date of review and achievement. It should also record what the next steps are given the results of the review.

If parents are confused or unsure of this process they should email me at: [vicki@dyslexia-awareness-uk.com](mailto:vicki@dyslexia-awareness-uk.com) with their concerns and I will try to point you in the right direction to gain support.

## 4. Employers

With the current financial crisis taking its grip on the UK today employers are having look very hard at who they keep and who they let go. All companies should be in the business of making

the most of their employees and bringing out the best in everyone. Irrespective of the financial circumstances we find ourselves in these days all employers have a statutory duty to make 'reasonable adjustments' for their dyslexic employees. In times of hardship this may seem a daunting prospect.

It is a common misconception that if you employ a dyslexic individual that you are heading for trouble, the support that they will need will be expensive, they will be difficult to manage and difficult to integrate into the existing staff team.

In reality, this is not necessarily the case - if you provide a supportive and dyslexia friendly environment dyslexic employees can be the most productive and loyal members of staff. They are keen to fit in, great at problem solving, creative in their approach and work harder to achieve results than their non-dyslexic counterparts. Dyslexic employees are rather more entrepreneurial than they are maverick in their approach to work and the nature of the job that they do.

The majority of dyslexic adults are completely unaware that they are dyslexic and those that do rarely disclose this fact. There are 6.9 million dyslexic individuals over the age of 16 years old in the UK today, out of which only one million of them have a formal diagnosis, a further 1.9 million recognise the signs of their dyslexia. There was no formal assessment available prior to the mid 70's so anyone over the age of thirty-five will not have had their condition recognised. As it say's in my biography, I was forty-six when I was diagnosed and that was only due to

the fact I went to work at the British Dyslexia Association where it was obvious to them through my over compensating style of working. I genuinely believed that I was thick (as I was consistently told at school), but I had a strong sense of the things that I could do and the things that I couldn't and therefore would not attempt. I recognise now that I had more avoidance strategies than I had coping strategies and this I believe to be true for the majority of dyslexic adults who are unaware of their dyslexia and the barriers it causes in successfully acquiring skills and embedding knowledge that can be reliably recalled.

Whilst some companies will undoubtedly be looking to cut staff others will be looking, in the first instance, to ensure they reduce staff costs in other ways. This might be by cutting the staff training and development budgets and other benefits. However, those who seek to empower their staff to ensure they are getting the best out of everyone will be the companies that not only survive but when the up-turn in the countries financial fortunes happens they will be ahead of their competitors because they will have a conscientious, experienced, productive and loyal workforce who will achieve even greater profits.

**How to achieve this idyll** - create a dyslexia friendly environment where staff are supported and supportive of each other, see themselves as ambassadors of the corporate values and brand and perceive themselves to have a duty and responsibility to give of their best, above all they feel a

valued and intrinsic part of the company.

**What is a dyslexia friendly environment?** What does it look like? How does it operate?

It starts with the induction process - to recruit and retain a new member of staff costs approximately £4,300 in the not-for-profit sector, £5,400 in the public sector and a staggering £8,000 in the private sector - a good induction programme sets out for the employee all the key policies, practices, and values of the company.

This need not be an expensive process and can easily be achieved in most companies, large or small, with existing budgets and resources without stinting on the quality of the programme. The CIPD recently ran a survey which found that over fifty-percent of job leavers left within the first year of service and the most common reason given was employee dissatisfaction which was picked up from day one.

For an information sheet on a **Dyslexia Friendly Induction Programme** please email me: [vicki@dyslexia-awareness-uk.com](mailto:vicki@dyslexia-awareness-uk.com).

A dyslexia friendly employer will ensure that their policies reflect best practice in relation to equality and diversity. Just as teachers are not actually taught anymore how to teach reading to school children, HR and Diversity professionals are often left to manage this process without any formal training in dyslexia awareness or other hidden disabilities. There is much emphasis on equality relating to creed, culture and race, physical and mental disabilities also feature highly in

policy and practice. It is woeful how little is known about dyslexia in the workplace and a very risky situation to be in for both the employer and the employee - the onus is on the employer to ensure that policy and practice does not discriminate against the employee from the moment they put out the recruitment advertisement. The responsibility falls to the dyslexic employee to disclose only if they require 'reasonable adjustments' to be put in place. With the recent spate of high profile discrimination cases being won in the law courts the precedent has been set in Case Law making it much easier for individuals to win tribunals against their employers. Within the industries against which these cases were brought much is being done to improve the situation, what surprises me is that outside these industries complacency still rules.

Employers should encourage disability forums to discuss the issues much more broadly than current practice. At the very least they should ensure that their HR and Diversity professionals (whether in-house or external) are dyslexia aware. They should examine closely their recruitment and induction policy and process to ensure compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act 1996/2005. If as a dyslexic individual I find it impossible to complete an application form for example, it should be possible for me to answer a set of questions in the form of a word-processed document with an accompanying CV. Failure to offer me this alternative could be construed as non-compliance.

Whilst, as a dyslexic person I do expect to have the key competencies

to do the job for which I have been employed, if I am handed a staff manual which is text heavy black print on white paper which contains such information as health and safety policy and procedures, and my employer expects me to read and comprehend this, that could be construed as non-compliance as it is an unrealistic expectation on their behalf. It is so easy in this day and age to produce sound files from word documents and by offering this alternative format to everyone - this is not only best practice but it also ensures compliance with the law.

A dyslexia friendly employer will not only provide alternative formats for all of its written documents it will also ensure that all of the computers are voice enabled so that employees can have text to voice software to read all of their documents irrespective of whether they created them or whether they were received.

A dyslexia friendly employer will have a buddy system in place from day one so that employees have someone they can talk things through with, gain clarity on anything that is not obvious and feel welcomed. This system paves the way for successful integration into the workforce and ensures all the basic 'must knows' are communicated.

A dyslexia friendly employer will have policies that apply to everyone to avoid the sense of the able and disabled. For example when a meeting is agreed an automated email or SMS text message will be sent to relevant personnel to confirm details of time, place and agenda. This will be resent twenty-four hours prior to the meeting-

taking place as reminder for everyone. Meeting documents will be sent at least twenty-four hours prior to the meeting to allow for pre-reading so that everyone is up to speed. The onus is then on the individual to read them or not, but everyone is given the opportunity.

A dyslexia friendly employer will conduct an informal pre-appraisal meeting to agree the structure and process to ensure that everyone is clear about the objectives and timeline this avoids unnecessary anxiety or feelings of being judged. It should be a two-way process giving equal emphasis on the employee's needs and the company's needs.

A dyslexia friendly employer will create opportunities to give positive feedback to employees outside the appraisal meetings and does not deliver negative feedback, irrespective of circumstances, within the ear shot of others.

All of the above, as you will know, constitutes best practice. However, many of the managers in post today have not received reliable management training and very few companies create opportunities for this type of training, yet, just like teachers need to be trained in how to teach reading to learners, managers need to be trained in people management skills, we are not all natural born leaders.

For information sheets on 'reasonable adjustments' or becoming a dyslexia friendly employer or if you would like receive dyslexia awareness training tailored to the needs of your industry/workplace please email me for

# Dyslexia Awareness UK

more information: [vicki@dyslexia-awareness-uk.com](mailto:vicki@dyslexia-awareness-uk.com).

or telephone Dyslexia Awareness UK :  
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