



Dyslexia in the workplace

Statistics published this month by the Helen Arkell Dyslexia Centre demonstrate that dyslexia amongst undergraduates is being diagnosed at an ever increasing rate. The implications for future employers are that they will face challenges in getting the best out of these dyslexic individuals. The keys to success will be ensuring that the employer's policy and practice is compliant and that they understand what 'reasonable adjustments' are and how to implement them successfully.

There are implications too for HR professionals, as well as learning and development trainers. If issues in the workplace come to a head, then it will be these professionals who will be required by line managers to find solutions.

I was recently involved in a case where an individual with dyslexia, who had worked for an organisation for thirteen years with an excellent development and performance record, found herself with a new set of managers. Under the new management team this individual began to underachieve, and the standard of her work appeared to fall month on month. During an appraisal meeting she pointed

out that the new systems that had been brought in worked against her, and because of the lack of flexibility in these systems she had no way of improving her performance. The situation was referred to HR management who put in place a workplace assessment for the individual. Assistive technology was recommended, but this did not take account of the management style issues. This was highlighted by the individual and dyslexia awareness training for the line managers was put in place. As a result the issues were resolved and the individual is now operating at peak performance. This situation took several months to resolve. As a consequence, the company lost several thousand pounds in lost production and the individual lost her annual bonus.

This scenario is not uncommon and demonstrates how easily situations can arise through general lack of awareness. A few hundred pounds in awareness training could have saved the company a significant amount of money; furthermore the individual concerned would have been saved the stress, anxiety and lost performance bonus.

With many more confirmed dyslexic graduates coming into the job market in the future, this area is going to become a minefield if employers are not prepared to take a few prudent steps now to avoid falling into similar situations.

To find out more about dyslexia awareness training workshops contact: **Dyslexia Awareness UK.**

Our workshops are affordable and available for delivery at your place of work at a time to suit you.



Visual Spatial Thinkers

Visual spatial thinkers are some of the most highly gifted individuals. They generally achieve phenomenal scores in IQ tests with their amazing ability to solve problems presented visually and are able to decipher items that require excellent abilities to visualise. They also are adept at spatial tasks, such as orientation problems.

These individuals usually think in 3D pictures rather than words. They tend not to learn things in a sequential order but all at once. They do not learn from repetition or drill; they are global thinkers (or 'strategic thinkers'). They are more comfortable with new information if they can put it into context with the big picture. They prefer access to all the information (early on) so they can relate it to the overall goal.

Once they have all the pieces, learning is permanent. These individuals are the teacher's worst night mare. They can appear to be easily distracted, yet know the answers. However, they cannot necessarily fill in all the detail.

These individuals can be challenging to live with as they tend not to be aware of mess, can be organisationally weak, and appear not to be conscious about time. These are the children that spend hours

doing advanced puzzles, building LEGO constructions, counting everything, playing chess at an early age, experimenting with any material at hand, always inventing something, preferring to take things apart rather than play with them and can compose wild imaginative stories. They tend to have larger than usual vocabularies at an early age, and learn to read whole words rather than break words down.

In the workplace these are the individuals who will dazzle you with their amazing ideas, but disappoint you with their lack of attention to routine. They will work out how to repair the broken machine, even though they have no formal training. They will design the ideal layout for the office or will be able to fit supplies into an impossibly small space. They will be the first to grasp complex concepts yet probably not know how to complete the simplest of tasks. Their keyboard skills will be fantastic but ask them to write something and it will be illegible. They have great problem solving skills. They tend not to worry about what others think of them and can appear to be less than a team player, preferring to use their own initiative and work things out their own way.

These individuals are often thought of as eccentric or having eccentric tendencies.

Whether they are in education or the workplace they have exceptional visual abilities along with some rather annoying weaknesses. They do not always shine academically, but it is obvious that they have exceptional talents relating to their visual strengths. They develop later than auditory sequential thinkers and usually their talents are more appreciated once they have left education. To find out more

about visual spatial thinkers visit
www.visualspatial.org.



More girls gain learning support.

Is it fact or fiction that more girls gain more learning support? Over the past few years I have taught children with dyslexia in secondary schools and assessed undergraduate students for their Disabled Students Allowance. In my experience I have observed how girls are far more open than boys to accepting the help of a specialist dyslexia teacher. Boys on the other hand are happier accepting assistive technology to overcome their difficulties.

When I was supporting learners with dyslexia in secondary school I have to admit that in my situation the help was offered for a set number of weeks. The school's special educational needs co-ordinator selected the children requiring support, which was then mandatory for those children. Attendance was not optional, albeit that if a child was particularly against the idea they did manage to find ways to opt out. The fourteen year old boys that I supported were indeed reticent at first, but by week three they began to openly enjoy the activities, and by the end of the individual programme they were disappointed that it was not going to continue.

The boys found the social consequences harder to cope with. However, they were in no doubt that the skills they had learnt made a significant difference to their examination chances.

The gender difference was equally differentiated in the undergraduate students that I assessed. During these interviews the boys would willingly accept the assistive software and hardware, but when the suggestion of specialist learning support was posed, they became reticent. When asked "*why the reticence?*", they often could not express their reasons. This was particularly true of those who had not received help from a specialist dyslexia teacher or those who had not received any support in the past.

For those who had received past support from a teaching assistant (a non-dyslexia specialist), they did not always find the support useful, explaining that they felt humiliated by having to either leave normal lessons or having to work in a group with the teaching assistant sitting with them, which they admitted affected their confidence in their ability to do the task in hand. Many reported that the support provided did not resolve their issues.

For those who had not received any past support, their attitude was one of '*can't do*'; therefore, they were closed to the suggestion that through being taught the appropriate techniques they could overcome their difficulties.

It was apparent to me that girls were much more willing to accept whatever help was on offer to enable them to achieve their goals. I believe that this comes out of their experiences from a very early age where they learn to cover

their perceived physical flaws. They employ make-up to cover spots, use hair ribbons and other accoutrements to make themselves more attractive, wear certain clothes and use of all kinds of ploys to achieve the 'look' they aspire to. This may have been borne out of vanity, but in the long term it has provided them with an approach to all aspects of life that enables them to believe that if something is not right, then with a little help, it can be fixed.

I am of the opinion that a lot more could be done to help boys have a similar approach. Boys need to be affirmed in everything that they do. The language we use with boys needs to be more explicit in so far as pointing out where they have happily accepted help and how this has improved whatever activity they were engaged in at the time. When boys are learning to play a sport, for example, a specialist coach is seen as a positive benefit. When learning to drive a car they accept driving lessons from a professional instructor. However, they do not make the connection between this type of support and the support a specialist teacher is able to offer them. I appreciate that they may have had negative experiences with teaching assistants in the mainstream classroom and this will colour the way they perceive future offers of learning support.

In my experience, where boys have received the appropriate help at the appropriate time, they achieve equally as well as girls. If a proactive approach was taken to help boys understand that they will gain the same benefits from specialist dyslexia tuition as they gained when they obtained help with other activities, they would become more open to these learning opportunities.

Through positively demonstrating where help was offered and success achieved, and that the same applies to learning support, boys will feel more confident about taking these opportunities.

The definition of success needs to be clear. I am not referring to becoming world class, as that is an ideal. Success should be defined by the tiny deliberate steps taken to achieve goals. Praise must not be superficial as this will be seen through. However, where even the tiniest of steps have been successfully achieved, and when worthy praise is given, this underpins the child's confidence and acts as encouragement for them to take the next steps towards a target outcome.

It is well to bear in mind that, for an undergraduate, there is far more specialist support available than at secondary school (as a general rule). It may be truly difficult, when in a tricky situation, to enable boys to understand the benefits of support, especially when it is not available. However, building their confidence is not only wise for their long term prospects, but also prudent as it may open them up to opportunities whilst at university that were not available to them in secondary school.

Dyslexia Awareness UK is able to offer assessment of specific learning difficulties, dyslexia, specialist dyslexia tuition, dyslexia awareness workshops, workplace assessments, disability student allowance assessment and bespoke training courses.

To find out how we can help you or your child please contact us.

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