

Positive features of dyslexia and neurodiversity

- **Use of the term 'neurodiverse'.**

This term includes individuals who have a 'different' or atypical way of thinking and doing. This group includes those who are dyslexic, dyspraxic, have ADHD, are on the autistic spectrum and so on.

Neurodiverse ways of thinking are as acceptable as neuro-typical ones.

The term emphasises the **positive** approach to these different ways of thinking, rather than considering them to be difficulties or disabilities (as in 'Specific Learning Difficulties').

The term has been in use for 10 years and is becoming widely used.

The main concept is that people are **differently** abled: i.e. that dyslexia etc. is a **difference** and not necessarily a **difficulty**.

- There are many potential strengths associated with the dyslexic mind including:

- Creativity
- Thinking laterally and making unexpected connections
- Problem solving
- Seeing the bigger picture
- Thinking 'outside the box'; being able to find several (possibly unorthodox) solutions for a problem
- Communication skills
- Social skills and team work
- Performance skills
- Strong empathy skills
- Visual spatial skills and being able to think easily in 3D
- Being highly motivated and determined
- An ability to see patterns.

Beryl Benacerraf, a world-renowned radiologist and expert in ultrasound has said, "Because of dyslexia, my brain works differently and I can see

these patterns. I do have a gift that other people don't have, and I will always stay ahead of the crowd and see more in an image than other people"

(Boyle, A. (2017). *Beryl Benacerraf, M.D., Radiologist & Expert in Ultrasound During Pregnancy*. <https://dyslexia.yale.edu/story/beryl-benacerraf-m-d/>)

Examples of creativity and dyslexia can be found in the following

Gobbo, K. (2020). *Dyslexia and creativity: Diverse minds*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. See

<https://www.cambridgescholars.com/dyslexia-and-creativity>

where you can read an extract.

Cancer, A., Manzoli, S. & Antonietti, A. (2016). 'The alleged link between creativity and dyslexia: Identifying the specific process in which dyslexic students excel', *Cogent Psychology*, 3, 1.

See <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23311908.2016.1190309>

Gobbo, K. (2020). *Dyslexia & Creativity: Chuck Close's Micro-Uniting and Universal Design*. See <https://www.differentbrains.org/dyslexia-creativity-chuck-closes-micro-uniting-and-universal-design/>

Notice-ability (2020). *Our Story*. Retrieved June 22, 2020, from

<https://www.noticeability.org/who-we-are>

This includes a TED talk, 'The True Gifts of a Dyslexic Mind' by Dean Bragonier.

- **Positive recruitment of neurodiverse individuals**

- The world's 'leading music company' and publishers, Universal Music actively recruits neurodiverse individuals. In an interview (see

<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/universal-music-ceo-david-joseph-why-im-standing-up-for-difference-a4174601.html>)

the CEO, David Joseph, stated that up to 30% of his employees are neurodiverse in one way or another. His thought is that, "if world-changing ideas come from those who think differently, why are creative companies in the UK not doing more to attract and accommodate them?"

The company has published a handbook called 'Creative Differences' See <https://umusic.co.uk/creative-differences>

- GCHQ (the Government Intelligence Agency) positively recruits neurodiverse individuals. It has an article on its website, 'Daring to think differently and be different: why supporting neurodiverse staff is crucial to our work'. See

<https://www.gchq.gov.uk/information/daring-to-think-differently-and-be-different>

Although this focuses on autism, many of the points apply equally well to dyslexic or dyspraxic individuals.

Also see

Wood, V. (2019), 'GCHQ targeting dyslexic and neurodiverse people in recruitment drive, spy chief says'. *Independent* (online).

Available <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/gchq-jobs-recruitment-intelligence-spy-jeremy-fleming-dyslexia-disability-neurodiversity-a9163996.html>

- Harvard Business Review (May-June, 2017, pp.96-103) has an article by R. Austin & G. Pisano, G. 'Neurodiversity as a Competitive Advantage' see <https://celebratingneurodiversity365.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Neurodiversity-Is-a-Competitive-Advantage-article-in-Harvard-Biz-Review.pdf>

This states that “A growing number of prominent companies have reformed their HR processes in order to access neurodiverse talent; among them are SAP, Hewlett Packard Enterprise (HPE), Microsoft, Willis Towers Watson, Ford, and EY. Many others, including Caterpillar, Dell Technologies, Deloitte, IBM, JPMorgan Chase, and UBS” (p.2).

- **Successful figures**

There are many examples of successful dyslexic individuals, with several in the performing arts, including music. Nigel Kennedy, the violinist¹, and Cher, the singer² are both dyslexic. The opera singer Anna Devin, is dyslexic, is a BDA Ambassador. Details are available from bdamusicdyslexia@gmail.com See also Anna’s webinar for the Incorporated Society of Musicians, *Dyslexia and Music: A Personal Journey* (available at <https://www.ism.org/professional-development/webinars/dyslexia-webinar>). There is also a summary of the key points in the webinar on the BDA website: search for ‘music’. Other BDA Ambassadors include Mollie King, part of The Saturdays who also presents on BBC Radio 1 and A.J. and Curtis Pritchard, who are widely recognised from our TV screens, having starred in reality and talent shows. Additionally, we believe that Paloma Faith, from *The Voice* is dyslexic³, amongst others.

The book, *Positive Dyslexia* by Roderick Nicolson (see below) has a huge list within the ‘Dyslexia Hall of Fame’. (pp.28-33).

The book, *Creative Successful Dyslexic* by Margaret Rooke (2016, published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London) has the stories of 23 ‘high achievers’, including the dancer Darcey Bussell, the actors, Brian Conley, Zoë Wanamaker and Eddie

¹ Email to BDA Music 22nd January, 2020.

² Hampshire, S. (1990), *Every Letter Counts*, pp.159-163

³ See <http://www.learningwithdyslexia.co.uk/famous-dyslexics/>

Izzard, the writer, Lynda La Plante, the business man ('Dragons' Den') Theo Paphitis and the architect, Richard Rogers.

Susan Hampshire's book, *Every Letter Counts: Winning in life despite dyslexia* (1990, published Bantam Press, London) has 56 interviews, including a flautist and an opera singer/coach.

Karen Cousins' book *Dyslexia and Success: the winning formulas* (2020) includes case studies of 20 dyslexic individuals, including Sir Tom Jones, the singer; Phil Wainman a record producer and Stephen Wright and orchestral instrumentalist.

And the animated video *Seeing Dyslexia Differently*, produced by the BDA (accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=11r7CFIK2sc>) is well worth watching.

- **Other useful sources include**

Roderick Nicolson (2015), *Positive Dyslexia*. Published Sheffield: Rodin Books.

A 'major theme [of this] is 'work to your strengths'' and the book is set out in a dyslexia friendly way.

Eide, B.L. & Eide, F.F. (2011). *The Dyslexic Advantage: Unlocking the creative potential of the dyslexic brain*. London: Hay House Ltd.

This book categorises the main strengths of dyslexia as M – I – N – D

M – strength for **material reasoning**

I – strengths for **interconnected reasoning**

N – strengths for **narrative reasoning**

D – strengths for **dynamic reasoning**

See www.dyslexicadvantage.org/

Margaret Malpas (2017), *Self-Fulfilment with Dyslexia: A blueprint for success*. Published London: Jessica Kingsley. This provides a 'road

map' for the many individuals who experience dyslexia, 'to help them fulfil their true potential'.

See the 'Made by Dyslexia' website for positive stories on video (on YouTube)

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCLBUsgxhf_otK_qKoZnP0pA?reload=9

Seeing dyslexia differently You Tube

'If you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid'⁴

BDA Music. July 2020

⁴ Sometimes (and almost certainly erroneously) attributed to Albert Einstein