

Now is the time for the Dyslexic

One in ten people are Dyslexic but Dyslexia is still commonly regarded as a problem rather than a talent. Yet, in education and business it is becoming increasingly apparent that the unique attributes Dyslexics are gifted with offer a very different and valuable perspective. It is now argued that their skills – which no machine can replicate – will become more sought after than the medieval routines of reading, writing and counting as pioneering businesses place greater emphasis on creativity and innovation.

Thomas G. West is the director of the Centre for the Study of Dyslexia and Talent at George Mason University U.S.A. His books *In the Mind's Eye: Visual Thinkers*, *Gifted People With Dyslexia and Other Learning Difficulties* and *Thinking Like Einstein – Returning to Our Visual Roots with the Emerging Revolution in Computer Information Technology* are both highly acclaimed and illustrate the diversity of human brains and the constant technological change that demands visual strengths and not literal and lexical weakness.

With profiles of great visual talents such as Einstein and Leonardo da Vinci spilling from the pages of his books, West argues that alongside learning disabilities often come areas of genius. Speaking at a recent conference he said “There are a great deal of advantages that come with this way of thinking that aren’t really articulated. You need to be open to what nature’s telling you and explore. If you want to read the book of nature you need to make your own observations and not trust what people before you have said. Books aren’t necessarily right, we need to be innovative and do our own work and research for ourselves.” For thousands of years the technologies of reading and writing have promoted the dominance of the left hemisphere of the brain, known for its linear processing of words and numbers. Now, with computer technology rapidly becoming accessible and inexpensive, high-level work will eventually base itself on the construction and manipulation of complex information within fast moving computer imagery. With this evolution, the insight of visual thinking will be invaluable.

Similarly, John Stein, Professor of Physiology at the Sensorimotor Control Lab and Dyslexia Unit at Oxford University, U.K has been conducting extensive research into the field. While different types of nerve cells compete with each other in survival of the fittest, Dyslexic brains may develop with stronger ‘holistic’ tendencies

and may omit the other cells responsible for quick recognition of letters, numbers and their sounds.

Stein has been heavily involved in the study of magnocellular neurones in the brain and how their impaired development can lead to the memory, auditory, visual and attentional problems that Dyslexics are often found to have. Through his research he has been able to define uncomplicated strategies to alleviate certain aspects of Dyslexia without having unwanted effects on artistic talents. It has been proven that taking omega-3 fish oils and wearing coloured filters as glasses can greatly improve their function. Stein states that it is important that the whole education system and work ethic is not “subordinated into literacy and linear logic” and instead becomes a space in which imagination and visual representation sits alongside it without questioning.

Advances in the understanding of Dyslexia have been significant over the last ten years but only recently have successful strategies for teaching the visual and holistic minded filtered through in to education. As Director of Footnotes Visual Thinking Techniques for Learning and Personal Development and a Dyslexic himself, Oliver West brings a dynamic dimension to previous research and development in the field. His innovation ‘Footnotes’ comprises of a system that utilises imagery and annotation to create holistic image maps that allow the thinker to organise and process information from personal management through to education and business.

By incorporating a different approach from conventional learning methods, Oliver West has created a technique that allows Dyslexics and like-minded people to be in control of their own learning and formulate their own ideas allowing them to harness their visual creativity and not forcing them to conform. “It’s more about Dyslexic’s identifying these skills because they have to develop them to survive. Anyone can draw but we each draw in different ways. If logic didn’t get in the way, many more linear thinkers would be able to think in a more holistic manner. That’s already beginning to happen - people are used to Television and processing fast moving visual information that can be very random and isn’t sequential. We’re all developing the ability to process information in visual terms faster and faster with each generation that passes. Dyslexics are just ahead of the game.”