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BLOG**

The other side of dyslexia

Dyslexia Awareness Week focuses on the benefits it brings to a sufferer, such as high IQ, curiosity and a strong work ethic

I didn't discover I was dyslexic until I was 50. After discovering our children were dyslexic my wife, wanting to support the children, took herself off to study dyslexia and qualified as an assessor. The confirmation of my own dyslexic disposition came when she used me as a guinea-pig to practise her newly acquired skills.

Thus I have made two journeys through dyslexia – my own in blissful ignorance, and a second with my children which was altogether more traumatic. I discovered the dyslexic world is full of conundrums and I have written a book about them.

For my part I am a hitherto undiagnosed adult dyslexic, schooled in the 1950s and 60s by chanting mantras of reading, writing and arithmetic in a rote fashion that suits the way many dyslexic brains learn. For many of my cohorts, life worked out, but those schooled in the experimental 70s and 80s may not have been so lucky.

Statistics suggest around 1 in 9 people struggle with dyslexia. Statistics lie – especially with children where parents, family, teachers and classmates are affected by the fall out. Every diagnosis of dyslexia can impact on half a dozen people, possibly more.

This week is Dyslexia Awareness Week and the focus is on the strengths of dyslexia. The good news for all those who have to face up to dyslexia is that we are generally individuals of higher than average IQ, born with inquisitive minds and a strong work ethic, who with diligent effort can not only learn to perform everyday tasks as well as non-dyslexics, we can go on to become high achievers.

From Leonardo da Vinci to Richard Branson and Benjamin Zephaniah, dyslexics do remarkable things because we join things up differently. It is almost as though nature ring-fenced 90% of her human capital to establish 'normality' and then decided to create a maverick dyslexic community to challenge the norm and be innovators and inventors.

Society typically struggles with the lexicon of dyslexia. Technically we are 'disabled' and covered by the Disability Discrimination Act. In truth we don't as much have a disability as an 'inability' to do certain things in the same way and same time frame as the normal world. Conversely we have 'abnormal' abilities in creativity and problem solving that can be incredibly enabling.

Education struggles too. Having dyslexic children of my own I have realised that dyslexia adds another challenging and very tiring subject to the curriculum – Dyslexia, Learning and Memory Studies. The DSA entitles dyslexic undergrads to a computer. Why not let dyslexic seven-year-olds have the computers, rather than foster low self-

esteem by obliging them to write by hand?

Dyslexics are different. Look inside our heads and you find our brains are abnormal. While the non-dyslexic brain has a larger left hemisphere, the dyslexic brain has identical hemispheres. In a world where bi-lateral symmetry is valued as a thing of beauty, perhaps we can rest assured we are nature's chosen ones.

Al Cambell is author of *A Dyslexic Writes*, priced £5.99 and available at www.adyslexicwrites.com

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