



Dyslexia Myth #1: Dyslexic people are all very creative.

I often hear colleagues pronouncing that dyslexic learners are all very creative, but I do wonder what the evidence for that is, and what they mean by 'creative'.

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The implication often seems to be that although they may find 'academic', text-based subjects challenging, at least our dyslexic learners will out-perform all their peers when it comes to Music, Drama or Art. Anecdotally, it is easy to collect a portfolio of examples of dyslexic learners who ARE really good at Art, or who shine when it comes to Music. The same is true of Sport. And, incidentally, Science and Technology. And – yes, even English and History too.

Actually, dyslexic learners are all different: they each have a unique profile of strengths and challenges, influenced by their own interests and their learning environment. People who love drawing (for example) and have the opportunity to draw, will probably put more of their energy into that, and so become better at it, gaining increasing satisfaction from their success – a positive feedback cycle. Students who find text-based lessons daunting may well focus more of their attention on more practical subjects, and therefore succeed in them. However, if the text-heavy subjects could be taught in a different way, they might also excel at those.

True, dyslexia is characterized in part by an ability to see the world differently from the way the majority of the population see it. This can also sometimes entail the ability to find innovative solutions to problems. That is an important form of creative thinking, but it's often overshadowed by the more commonly-held belief that dyslexic people should be brilliant at sewing, or pottery.

I do sometimes wonder what it must be like to be dyslexic and not particularly 'arty'. Does it feel like a double failure? Experiencing barriers with the 'academic' stuff, AND not great at Art. We know that many dyslexic and dyspraxic learners benefit from developing their sense of rhythm, to help them process language (perceiving syllables, and the rhythm of speech). When we consider that dyspraxia and dyslexia very often co-occur, it's not hard to imagine the kinds of challenges that neurodivergent learners might face in living up to their 'creative' reputation.

While I would certainly recommend that dyslexic people (indeed - all of us) explore a wide range of activities to discover what we enjoy and where our talents lie, I think that the expectation of 'creative' talent in our dyslexic learners needs to be carefully managed. If someone enjoys an activity, that should be enough, without having to be a genius at it.

To find out more about dyslexia and its impacts on learning, visit www.ELTwell.com.