

# A Strengths Based Approach

## Strengths

It is vital that teachers are alert to and recognise the strengths that students who appear to be dyslexic may have, and the ways in which many may develop compensatory skills to mask or sidestep their difficulties. It is also important for teachers to understand just how much hard work is involved in the struggle to cope in the classroom when the literacy skills that most people take for granted are not available or are constantly just out of reach.

To find out that I was dyslexic was a relief. I had thought I was merely stupid. It made others patient with me and, more significantly, perhaps, it made me patient with myself. I recall that almost physical sensation of mist clearing, until then I and people closest to me felt like we were walking in a dark cloud.

*Anonymous*

We are told our dyslexic children often become successful when they leave school. Surely, we want them to experience success whilst they are there!  
*Parent*



# A Strengths Based Approach (TED talks)



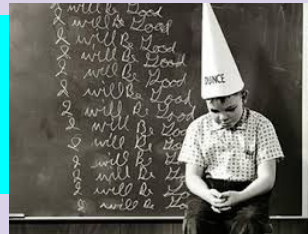
[The True Gifts of a Dyslexic Mind \(Dean Bragonier\)](#)



[The Creative Brilliance of Dyslexia \(Kate Griggs\)](#)



[The Gift of Dyslexia \(Julie Salisbury\)](#)



Young adults with dyslexia describe how harnessing their strengths has enabled them to flourish in their chosen careers.

<https://www.speld.org.nz/success-stories>

# A Strength Based Approach

## 1. Seeing the bigger picture

People with dyslexia often see things more holistically.

They miss the trees but see the forest.



*"It's as if people with dyslexia tend to use a wide-angle lens to take in the world, while others tend to use a telephoto, each is best at revealing different kinds of detail."*

**Matthew H. Schneps, Harvard University**

# Strength Based Approach

## 2. Finding the odd one out

People with dyslexia excel at global visual processing and the detection of impossible figures. Dyslexic scientist Christopher Tonkin described his unusual sensitivity to “things out of place.” Scientists in his line of work must make sense of enormous quantities of visual data and accurately find black hole anomalies.

There are so many people with dyslexia in the field of astrophysics that it prompted research at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics. Findings confirmed that those with dyslexia are better at identifying and memorizing complex images.



# Strength Based Approach

## 3. Improved pattern recognition

People with dyslexia have the ability to see how things connect to form complex systems, and to identify similarities among multiple things. Such strengths are likely to be of particular significance for fields like science and mathematics, where visual representations are key.

*"I recognized that I had dyslexia and then I realized I had this gift for imaging. I live in a world of patterns and images, and I see things that no one else sees. Because of dyslexia, I can see these patterns."*

*"You can't overcome it (dyslexia); you can work around it and make it work for you, but it never goes away. That's probably a good thing, because if dyslexia went away, then the other gifts would go away too."*

**Beryl Benacerraf, M.D., Physician. World-renowned radiologist and expert in ultrasound.**



# Strength Based Approach

## 4. Good spatial knowledge

Many people with dyslexia demonstrate better skills at manipulating 3D objects in their mind. Many of the world's top architects and fashion designers have dyslexia.

*"I was called stupid. Not only could I not read, but I couldn't memorize my school work. I was always at the bottom of the class. I became very depressed."*

**Richard Rogers**

*"I performed poorly at school – when I attended, that is – and was perceived as stupid because of my dyslexia. I still have trouble reading. I have to concentrate very hard at going left to right, left to right, otherwise my eye just wanders to the bottom of the page."*

**Tommy Hilfiger**



# Strength Based Approach

## 5. Picture Thinkers

People with dyslexia tend to think in pictures rather than words. Research at the University of California has demonstrated children with dyslexia have enhanced picture recognition memory.

Nineteenth-century French sculptor, Auguste Rodin, could stare at paintings in museums by day and paint them from memory at night. His dyslexia meant he could barely read or write by the age of 14, with his reading skills developing much later.



## 6. Sharper peripheral vision

People with dyslexia have better peripheral vision than most, meaning they can quickly take in a whole scene. Although it can be hard to focus in on individual words, dyslexia seems to make it easier to see outer edges.

James Howard Jr., a professor of psychology at the Catholic University of America, described in the journal *Neuropsychologia* an experiment in which participants were asked to pick out the letter T from a sea of letter L's floating on a computer screen. Those with dyslexia identified the letter more quickly.





# Strength Based Approach

## 7. Business entrepreneurs

Did you know that one in three American entrepreneurs have dyslexia?

Entrepreneurs like Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, Steve Jobs and Charles Schwab were all dyslexic. Perhaps better strategic and creative thinking could provide a real business advantage.



*"I seemed to think in a different way from my classmates. I was very focused on trying to set up a business and create something. My dyslexia guided the way we communicated with customers."*

**Richard Branson**

# Strength Based Approach

## 8. Highly creative

Many of the world's most creative actors have dyslexia, such as Johnny Depp, Keira Knightly and Orlando Bloom.

*"Many of the super creative designers I have worked with seemed to have one thing in common; they suffered from dyslexia."*

**Soren Petersen, Design Research PH.d**

### **Pablo Picasso (Artist)**

Picasso was described by his teachers as "having difficulty differentiating the orientation of letters". Picasso painted his subjects as he saw them – sometimes out of order, backwards or upside down. His paintings demonstrated the power of his imagination, which was perhaps linked to his the inability to see written words properly.



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## 9. Thinking outside the box – problem solving

Those with dyslexia are well known for having sudden leaps of insight that solve problems with an unorthodox approach.

This is an intuitive approach to problem solving that can seem like daydreaming. Staring out of the window is how dyslexics work, letting their brain slide into neutral and ease itself around a problem to let connections assemble.



# Supporting Neurodiversity

[James Ross](#) - a recent article.

Main Points from the article :

- in 2002, James Ross's employer (Waimakariri District Council) tried to fire him for not disclosing he had a disability (Dyslexia)
- the case made national headlines in 2002/03 and went to the Employment Relations Authority - James won reinstatement and a payout
- James went on to set up the Know Dyslexia Charitable Trust and become a public speaker and advocate for those with dyslexia
- James supports the Ron Davis method of treating dyslexia, where students are taught three-dimensionally
- although the experience was horrific, James was still thankful because it taught him not to be ashamed of his dyslexia

## James Ross on his battle with dyslexia: 'I found myself humiliated'

17 Mar, 2019 11:00am

© 9 minutes to read



James Ross. Photo / George Novak

# Supporting Neurodiversity

Article - [Abolishing dyslexia stigma](#)

A writer and entrepreneur — who is dyslexic — advocates abolishing the stigma and shame associated with learning disabilities by looking at reading in a whole new way.

This article challenges the mindset of dyslexia, as well promotes the use of assistive technology to support dyslexic students.

by: [Ben Foss](#) | March 2, 2016

