

"Talking Point..."

The Gift of Dyslexia?

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Ade Adipetan MBE was a bronze medallist in the 2004 Olympics. He is one of the most athletic, talented, ambitious and charismatic people in Britain. Ade uses a wheelchair. Until the age of 12 Ade was adapting himself. With the well-meaning help of health professionals, he used callipers to enable him to function in the 'World of Normal People'.

At the age of 12 two physiotherapists spotted him flying down the road with his mates pushing him in a Tesco's trolley. They didn't see a young black guy with a disability; they saw a potential athlete who would obviously be an asset to a team. Where would he be now if he hadn't been spotted by those two physios? What chance did he stand growing up in East London as a young black guy with a disability? The odds were stacked against him.

From then on the calipers were discarded. That one decision early on changed his life forever. What is interesting is to realize that Ade has a disability, not necessarily a handicap. In fact his life has become an exemplar for 'disability' to be an asset in many ways.

I do not have a bronze medal from the Olympics or an MBE. I'm not a TV presenter. I am dyslexic. I have known I am dyslexic since the age of about 12 when there was a storyline dealing with it on Grange Hill. I recognized it straight away. From the age of 7 I had attended remedial classes within my primary school. At the age of 10 I began to attend 'the Unit' once a week. Although I would admit to enjoying my time at the Unit, it would have to be said that the stigma of going once a week stayed with me for a long

time. It's not always great being 'special'. I knew I was not being given the credit for the brains I felt I had. I knew that my understanding of the world around me was different to most of my fellow pupils.

Confusion reigned in the school when I passed my eleven plus. Something had gone wrong. The children from the Unit didn't pass the eleven plus! From then on life became harder and harder, the local grammar school was not prepared for people like me. I struggled on from day to day becoming more and more depressed. I hated school. I became school phobic. My poor mum had to drag me to school every day. By the age of 15 my head of year was collecting me in the mornings to make sure I attended. I was under the care of not only my GP but also the borough educational psychologists. I was tested and counselled to within an inch of my life, literally. At the age of 15 I was rushed to hospital having taken an overdose. This was probably my lowest point.

Following this incident I was referred to the Child Psychology Department at Guy's Hospital in London. After some more tests the psychologist informed my parents that I was dyslexic. We discovered that there was help available. We also discovered that as far as the local authority was concerned, dyslexia was not an option.

At the age of 45 I had been away from formal education for over 25 years when I found myself working as a technician in the workshops of a drama college. Last year I was approached by a member of the faculty who offered me the opportunity to take part in a

Postgraduate Certificate for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. I thought long and hard before accepting this opportunity. I spent time explaining to the tutors that my dyslexia probably meant that I was unsuitable for this course. It was explained to me that most of the course was online and most of the resources would have visual equivalents which would allow me to access the material without having too much reading. However, despite the best efforts of tutoring staff, it was inevitable that a large amount of reading was required to enable me to access material which I needed to understand. There was also a large written element to the course which I also found difficult. Having spoken to the college's disability advisor, I found that help was available. The disabled students allowance (DSA) would give me access to appropriate hardware and assistive software to enable me to take part fully in the course.

So the process of assessment with an educational psychologist that had begun 30 years ago continued. Initially the testing had to be delayed for several minutes while I composed myself, sitting at a table with the self-same tests from all those years ago in front of me. They brought back many memories. My hands shook. As the tests began I started to relax, I noticed the tone of the psychologists beginning to express curiosity at the results emerging. It was only once all the tests had been completed that I became aware of what was causing curiosity. The results were somewhat unusual. My abilities in the areas of logic, spatial awareness and general knowledge turned out not to be good, but to be exceptional. It transpired that in these areas I was positioned in the 99.7 percentile. However, my reading and processing skills were placed somewhere between the 10th and 20th percentile. The psychologist informed me that in her long experience, not only was I the first person

ever to score 100% in three of the tests but this was the greatest discrepancy between the two areas that she had ever seen.

Strangely my first reaction was not to be pleased about how well I had scored in the first area, but to feel very embittered by the results of the latter part of the test. The assessment process continued. Through it I have been supplied with a laptop and assistive software, and this is invaluable. Without it, this article would not have been written, or to put it correctly, would not have been dictated. I would have to say that I'm extremely grateful for the help, patience and kindness which have been shown to me throughout.

However, I would have to question whether this assistance is not my callipers? Everything has been done to help me to fit into the norm, around which higher education revolves. When I look at it, it is like 'Ade, you have to question whether he is actually disabled or rather, differently able'. Too often, rather than looking at the individual we look at the disability. As I have mentioned before, in many areas of his life Ade is not handicapped by the difference in his ability. In fact, quite the contrary, his abilities have opened doors which for many others will always remain closed. Few of us can claim to be Olympic athletes. Few of us will ever become television presenters. Few of us will become ambassadors for a section of our society, and be given an MBE. All of these Ade has achieved by throwing away his walking aids and accepting his wheels.

The question which I would like to raise through this article is how much richer our society would be if our education system, rather than spending vast fortunes attempting to 'normalise' people with a perceived disability, found a way to value and optimise the skills of differently able students. If the positive aspects of my dyslexia had been

embraced and nurtured, rather than the negative aspects been 'dealt with', where would I be now? Who knows? The fact is that I now find myself in a good place, my family, friends and students recognising me for who I am and valuing my contribution.

However, within the educational establishment, my position is somewhat ambiguous. Why do we insist on shoe-horning talented people into higher education and

degrees, when we should be spending our time looking for ways to add value to the abilities that people so clearly already have? I am unsure whether I have expressed my views on this very clearly, but I hope reading this piece gives us a chance to discuss whether our current system of higher education is meeting the needs of our society. So much latent ability is being wasted due to our obsession with degrees as the way forward for 'able' students.

Scenario-Based Evaluation of an Ethical Framework for the Use of Digital Media in Learning and Teaching

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Introduction and background

Interest in educational podcasting, audio feedback and media-enhanced learning, in its various forms, has grown due to the increased access academic staff and students have to new technologies. The benefits have been widely reported in the educational development and disciplinary literature on learning technology, mobile learning, digital age learning, and assessment and feedback. However, such literature focuses more on what can be done, rather than if it *should* be done. Hargreaves (2008) signals the need to balance ethical risk in the creative curriculum with actions that maximise beneficence, especially within the context of a sector that espouses to develop critical skills in learners. In a world of constantly developing technology, it is not always easy to appraise the implications of a pedagogic innovation. As practitioners concerned with academic development, our aim is to facilitate academics to reflect on their practice from a

variety of perspectives, and we felt that an easy-to-use ethical framework could assist academics to identify potential ethical problems.

The Media-Enhanced Learning Special Interest Group (MELSIG) is a UK network of academics, developers and learning technologists. They identified the need to consider the ethical risk associated with using digital media in response to examples described in recent literature, and ideas generated by its community. It was as a result of discussions at MELSIG that this collaborative work began. The three members of MELSIG were joined by a colleague with an interest in ethics but who was relatively inexperienced with new technologies. When this work began we looked primarily at digital media, but it is considered that such a framework can be used to appraise the use of other new technologies in learning and teaching.