Asia Pacific Journal of Developmental Differences
Vol. 3, No. 1, January 2016, pp 87—130
DOI: 10.3850/S2345734114000232

Dyslexia, Success and Post-Traumatic Growth

Neil Alexander-Passe [1*]

1 Head of Learning Support, Mill Hill School, London

Abstract

This paper looks at the origins of success in dyslexic adults, using both an online survey to locate successful dyslexic adults (N=101), and a sub-group of interview participants (N=20) to understand the nature and motivation of success in adults with dyslexia. School trauma was a focus of the study, using the theory of 'Post-Traumatic Growth' as a means to understand how individuals can have a traumatic and humiliating schooling, but still gain post-school success through positive use of trauma.

The 30 item online survey reflected the 8 main item investigative interview script, so that both quantitative and qualitative data could be studied. The items looked at: personality descriptions by others, supportive parents, trauma at school, avoidance at school, excellence in non-academic subjects, leadership qualities, team-building, delegation, gut intuition, use of mentors, motivation, unique selling points (USPs), risk, failure, pursuit of passions, creativity and entrepreneurship. A consistency of response was found between the two groups researched, with comments from the interview study enriching the responses from the online survey to present a coherent picture of success.

The interview study also proposed that school trauma could become a positive force in creating successful and resilient dyslexics, with interesting responses as participants coped with the concept of 'what doesn't kill you makes you stronger' by the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1888).

Keywords: Dyslexia, success, school, post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD, post-traumatic growth

* *Correspondence to:*
Neil Alexander-Passe, Email: neilpasse@aol.com, www.dyslexia-research.com

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

Background

This paper will investigate dyslexia and success, looking at the motivations and processes that a dyslexic experiences through school, turning childhood school oppression into adulthood workplace success.

Dyslexia

Definition: Dyslexia (specific reading disability) is defined as a learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling. Characteristic features of dyslexia are difficulties in phonological awareness, verbal memory and verbal processing speed. Dyslexia occurs across the range of intellectual abilities. It is best thought of as a continuum, not a distinct category, and there are no clear cut-off points. Co-occurring difficulties may be seen in aspects of language, motor co-ordination, mental calculation, concentration and personal organisation, but these are not, by themselves, markers of dyslexia. A good indication of the severity and persistence of dyslexic difficulties can be gained by examining how the individual responds or has responded to well-founded intervention. (Rose, 2009)

The recent influential but controversial review of literature by Elliot and Grigorenko (2014) argue that the term dyslexia poorly defines a condition that affects not only reading, writing, spelling, but also short-term memory, balance, organisation, visual difficulties. There are also difficulty with no single agreed model of diagnosis, with diagnosis being made through the recognition of difficulties in a range of skills with various assessment measures, thus diagnosis is made of 'dyslexic type difficulties'. Literature argues that no two dyslexics have the same range of difficulties, a view supported by UK Government's report (Rose, 2009).

It could be argued that there are two main perspectives concerning dyslexia, one looking at the root causes, be it through heredity or damage in early childhood, with a focus on the deficits that such a condition brings and how it can be overcome through remedial educational interventions. The second perspective looks at the emotional and psychological effects of having a different learning style than that of their friends, family and peers.

This paper is concerned with the second perspective, looking at both the emotional effects of school, and how dyslexic individuals use such effects in both their child and adulthoods to bring about positive change.

The typical school experience for dyslexics

Scott (2004), Edwards (1996) and Alexander-Passe (2010, 2012, 2015a) note that dyslexics commonly experience adversity as children, both educationally in school and socially through exclusion and bullying by peers due to their learning differences. Snowling (2000), Hulme & Snowling (2009) and Thomson (1996) note that dyslexics, due to their difficulties in phonological processing, spelling, grammar, reading and writing are at a distinct disadvantage in mainstream education, as Dyslexia

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

Action's recent report (2013) note that teachers lack the skills to effectively differentiate for dyslexic and other different learners in their classes. They also highlight the lack of special educational needs (SEN) training for new teachers and infrequent continual professional development (CPD) of current teachers.

Humphrey and Mullin (2002) and Humphrey (2003) identified low self-esteem in dyslexics, especially school-aged dyslexics, and Scott (2004) and Alexander-Passe (2010, 2015a) have argued that bullying by both teachers by their lack of differentiation/understanding and peers through ostracising and exclusion can lead to depression, withdrawal, self-harming and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Success

Definition: 'How each of us define success is deeply personal. We each have our own definition of success, for some success is about what we accomplish for others it's who we're becoming and still other it's what we own. The central issue is not what your definition of success contains or if it's right or wrong. Instead the central issues is have you created your own personal and organisational definition of success?' (Ambler, 2013)

Success is highly subjective and success to one is not the same to all, as noted by Krakovsky (2014), success is extremely hard to research.

According to Oxford Dictionaries (2013), success is defined as (1) the accomplishment of an aim or purpose: the president had some success in restoring confidence; (2) the attainment of fame, wealth, or social status: the success of his play; (3) a person or thing that achieves desired aims or attains fame, wealth, etc.: to judge from league tables, the school is a success, must make a success of my business.

To summarise the above, one could conclude that success is accomplishing an aim or goal, and in many ways it is aligned with fame, wealth and social status. This will be the basis of this paper.

In the case of dyslexics, success has been a recent focus however very little empirical research has been directed in this area. Logan (2009, 2010) investigated dyslexic entrepreneurs in both the UK and USA and found a higher number percentage of dyslexics were self-employed entrepreneurs than worked in large corporate organisations. Logan found that many felt unable to survive in corporate organisations and difficulty following strict working rules prohibited advancement.

There have however been many interviews of famous dyslexics (Coppola, 2007; Branson, 2015; Cass, 2011) e.g. Sir Richard Branson (UK-music and airline entrepreneur), Charles Schwab (USA-financial entrepreneur), Lord Richard Rogers (UK-architect), and Tom Cruise/ Whoopi Goldberg (USA-film stars) etc. These have focussed on specific examples of successful dyslexics but have not isolated common trends apart from troubled schooling. One of the few examples is Fink (2002) who conducted an interview study of 60 successful American dyslexics looking at common

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

traits. Many traits were identified e.g. pursuit of passionate interests, persistence, and empathy of others experiencing struggles in life. This paper aims to further develop such research with a mostly UK sample. An important contribution to the field comes from Nicolson (2015) who in his book, Positive dyslexia, outlines how to craft your environment towards success building on your signature strengths.

However not all dyslexics are successful and it is argued that many choose careers that do not play to their strengths e.g. administration (Alexander-Passe, 2012) resulting in a low self-esteem/self-concept, however many end up in prison. Dyslexia Institute (2005) and Henderson (2004) argue that high percentages of dyslexics, many undiagnosed, enter the prison population in the UK, US and 'Finland. Prison projects (Hewitt-Mann, 2012) suggest that the lack of such success occurs for various unknown reasons, however a lack of early identification and intervention seems evident.

The Disability Paradox

Researchers have recently begun to question why many individuals despite having disabilities enjoy a good standard of life, and have become successful. Rather than withdraw and be ashamed of their disabilities e.g. being in a wheelchair, having depression, suffering from MS, or a life threatening illness, they are thriving. The paradox (Levine, Feldman, Elinson, 1983; Lerner, Levine, Malspies, D'Agostino, 1994) is that too many looking at them would imagine a poor life satisfaction living an undesirable existence, however research suggests quite the contrary. Albrecht and Devlieger (1999) using a qualitative methodology with 153 individuals with serious and persistent disabilities, found 54.3% reported an excellent or good quality of life, suggesting the paradox. The research found after their initial shock of disability (developing MS, AIDS or diabetes, loosing limbs in a car crash etc); the ability to bounce back came from looking at positives, reassessing life's goals, and finding religious faith etc. Those who felt they had a poor quality of life manifested defeatist tendencies and a detachment from life. Albrecht and Devlieger concluded that those perceiving a high quality of life found a 'secondary gain' occurring with individuals with disabilities 'adapt[ing] to their new conditions and make sense of them, finding enriched meaning in their life secondary to their disability, and reinterpret their lives and reconstitute personal meaning in their social roles'. They 'understand their condition, take control, and introduce an order and predictability in their lives. They also learn what is and isn't possible, and develop a value set that helps them make sense of their disability, and harness support and other networks to receive and support others' (p. 986). In essence they are empowered rather than disempowered by their disabilities, finding the resolve to improve the world, and find a role for them in society. Interestingly the difficulties and scars come from the discrepancies: what they would like to do to what they can do, what they used to be able to do, and what they can now do.

The paradox highlights the importance of

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

personal experience with disability: defining the self, one's view of the world, social contexts, and social relationships. Lys & Pernice (1995) suggests there is a negative bias of attitudes and expectations by the public and health care workers towards persons with disabilities. Connally (1994) found public perceptions of a poor quality of life for individuals with disabilities. This can be understood by the work of Stiker (1997) that disability introduces chaos, ambiguity and unpredictability into the social world of the individual and community. Albrecht and Devlieger suggests that 'disability shatters preconceived expectations and norms, and calls accepted values and notions of well-being into question' (p. 980). Antonovsky (1987) and Lundberg (1997) suggest that individuals with disabilities have the capacity to find meaning, value and motivation to persist in the face of adversity, thus meaningfulness.

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Definition: PTSD, or post-traumatic stress disorder, is an anxiety problem that develops in some people after extremely traumatic events, such as combat, crime, an accident or natural disaster. People with PTSD may relive the event via intrusive memories, flashbacks and nightmares; avoid anything that reminds them of the trauma; and have anxious feelings they didn't have before that are so intense their lives are disrupted (APA, 2015a).

PTSD is a relatively new term and was identified in the study of those who returned from war zones, formerly the conditions were called 'shell-shock' to define similar traits. In more recent times the term has been the focus of many research studies and causes of such trauma have been identified in numerous unknown areas, according to the latest DSM-5 guidelines e.g. PTSD in children younger than 6 years and PTSD with prominent dissociative symptoms (either experiences of feeling detached from one's own mind or body, or experiences in which the world seems unreal, dreamlike or distorted) (APA, 2015b).

In the case of dyslexics, Scott (2004) and more recently Alexander-Passe (2010, 2015a) have argued that many dyslexics suffer from PTSD from adverse schooling. Alexander-Passe found in a study of N=29 dyslexic adults, many with depressive symptoms, that PTSD was evident when they needed to return to school for their own children, symptoms manifested included: resentment and anger towards teachers, severe anxiety when seeing and made to sit on primary school chairs, smelling floor cleaners, sitting waiting outside the Headmaster's office, hearing their child's teacher not listening to their concerns about their possible dyslexic child, and seeing children's work being pinned to the wall as their own was never deemed good enough.

Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG)

Definition: the term refers to positive psychological change experienced as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2001).

PTG is a very new term introduced by the American Psychiatric Association in (1980), and whilst examples of PTG have

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

been documented from the last century e.g. Roosevelt renewed empathy when being struck down with Polio and then became President of the USA, cancer sufferers and air craft crash victims who have been moved to have a renewed love of life and focus, Holocaust survivors who have been moved to share their traumatic and life changing experiences on a world wide stage etc. Linley & Joseph (2004) argue that 30-70% survivors of trauma have said they have experienced positive change in one form or another.

The term has recently been used to trigger new research to understand the growth gained through trauma and adversity (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006; Weiss & Berger, 2010), as a related positive psychology stance (Seligman, 2011).

Tedeschi & Calhoun (2004) argue that major life crises typically result in unpleasant psychological reactions, however PTG is argued to happen when attempts are made to adapt to highly negative sets of circumstances that can engender high levels of psychological distress. Tedeschi & Calhoun after reviewing available literature, argue that growth is more frequent than psychiatric disorders following high levels of trauma; however note that growth and personal distress often coexist, and stories over the centuries point to growth from distress e.g. Christianity: after Jesus's death his disciples whilst traumatised go onto create a powerful new religion, and Islamic: Mohammed's suffering is instrumental to his great work.

Examples of PTG have been documented in those surviving/suffering from:

- Bereavement (Hogan, Morese & Tason, 1996)
- HIV infection (Cadell & Sullivan, 2006)
- Death of a child (Keessee, Currier & Neimeyr, 2008; Znoj & Keller, 2002)
- Heart attacks (Laerum, Johnsen, Smith & Leving, 1987)
- Sexual assault and sexual abuse (Frazier, Conlon & Glaser, 2001)
- Combat (Elder & Clipp, 1989)

It is argued by Tedeschi & Calhoun (2004) and Schoulte, Sussman, Tallman, Deb, Cornick, Altmaier (2012) that the following PTG are typical manifestations:

- positive psychological change (Yalom & Lieberman, 1991)
- discovery of meaning (Bower, Kemeny, Taylor & Fahey, 1998)
- positive emotions (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000)
- positive reinterpretation (Scheier, Weintaub & Carver, 1986)

Tedeschi & Calhoun define the growth part of PTG comes not as a direct result of the trauma, but the individual's struggle with the new reality in the aftermath of trauma that defines if PTG in occurring. They use the metaphor of an earthquake, in that it is not the shake that causes the psychological trauma, but the effects of the shake in the building, lose of life, the change from predictable to unpredictability of life, and changes to their regular life pattern which is traumatic. Wright (1989) suggests that PTG is the consequence of psychological survival to coexist with the trauma. McFarland & Alvaro (2000) suggest that

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

most people have positive life changes without a trauma; however Tedeschi & Calhoun (1996) note that those who have experienced PTG have higher levels of personal change.
It is argued with PTG that it is not a return to baseline levels of activity that defines whether an individual has PTG or not, it is the improvement that is experienced, and that it is more common in adolescents and adults than children because PTG implies an established set of values changed through trauma.

It is argued that there are distinct differences between the concepts of post traumatic growth and resilience/ hardiness, optimism and sense of coherence:

- Resilience – the ability to live a purposeful life after hardship or adversity (Garmezy, 1985; Rutter, 1987)
- Hardiness – a tendency towards commitment, control and challenge in response to life events (Kobasa, Maddi, Puccetti & Zola, 1985)
- Optimism – the expectation of positive outcomes to events (Scheier & Carver, 1985)
- Sense of coherence – adding meaning to events to mange the stressful events (Antonovosky, 1987)
- Post traumatic stress – the ability to go beyond the normal ability to resist and to not be damaged by highly stressful circumstances, indicating the ability to cause personal/career transformations (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2004)

Research to understand the activity of PTG was initiated by Joseph & Linley (2005, 2008) and categorised as using person-centred 'organismic valuing theory' in that trauma causes a break down in self-structure (personal concepts of themselves and their place around others). People are intrinsically motivated towards processing new trauma-related information in ways to maximise their psychological well-being. Using the metaphor of a shattered vase, imagine that one day you break it by accident. You can either try to piece it together, to try to badly re-form the original shape, or you use the pieces to create a beautiful new mosaic. If your perspective is to bin the pieces and give up, or try and rebuild in entirety as the original vase – this is an impossible task as it will still be fractured, vulnerable and prone to break again. But if you take on board that a return to the original will be impossible and that you need to create a new use for the pieces, then you are more realistic and a new use can be considered.

Gunty, Frazier, Tennen, Tomisch, Tashiro, Park, 2011) and Zoellner & Maercker (2006) question PTG in that there is a weak correlation between the actual and perceived growth, and that the growth is illusionary as a way of coping with distress. Peterson & Seligman's (2003) before and after studies have demonstrated that growth occurs, but the measure used was relied on biased non-medical and somewhat biased personal opinion (e.g. The Psychological Well-Being Post Traumatic Changes Questionnaire-PWB-PTCQ by Joseph, Maltby, Wood, 2012).

In the case of dyslexics, there is very little to find. Alexander-Passe (2010) argues the concept of the two condition

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

coexisting with a study of N=29 adult dyslexics. That a pre-school child is normally taught through multi-sensory activity e.g. play and hands on learning with the need to read or write. Thus when a dyslexic child starts school, they come with an established set of rules (a belief system and assumptions about themselves in the world, which has guided them successfully to this point) about learning and believe themselves to be normal learners. However at the point that reading and writing is introduced, there is a change and a realisation that they may or may not be able to develop in line with their peers. The first trauma takes place in that they see their peers understanding and learning a new language of learning and they are unable to. The second and longer trauma is the ongoing effect on others of their inability to learn like their peers.

Summary

The empirical review suggests that dyslexics are affected as much as from their learning differences, as by how society views their difference. Such differences go beyond reading and writing, and affects their interactions with others. Trauma at school is a common experience for young dyslexics and it is argued that this trauma is both distressing and occurs continuously over a 10 year school career (resulting in post traumatic stress. It is argued by this author that dyslexics either rebuild positively their school/post-school lives (post traumatic growth) or remain shattered and fragile and which can result in unsuitable careers or a path ending up in prison.

This paper looks to an investigative qualitative study of 'Dyslexia and Success' to understand the personal histories of many successful dyslexics, and reflect this to their personal childhood histories of possible school trauma.

Methodology

This study used two methods to collect data to enrich this study:

- An online survey investigating 'dyslexia and Success' using SurveyMonkey.com. It aimed to promote the project and recruit volunteers for the second part of this project, investigating the perceptions of many successful dyslexics towards success and whether school oppression was a motivation for their success.
- A qualitative investigative interview study of N=20 successful dyslexics, selected from a pool of N=56 successful dyslexic participants from the online survey who offered to be interviewed.

Online survey study

This online survey of 30 items investigated a wide range of views concerning the dyslexic school experience, along with motivations for success, coping strategies used for success, traits of a successful dyslexic, and lastly the motivations for dyslexic success. The author marketed the survey on a new Twitter feed for the project (#DyslexicSuccess) and on his website (www.dyslexia-research.com) along with Dyslexia forums and dyslexia mailing groups. The author also actively researched both the internet and print

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

media for individuals that were both publically dyslexic and were successful in their chosen fields.

The sample was filtered to remove the following; non-dyslexics and those who were not assessed by either a qualified specialist teacher or educational/clinical psychologist. This left a sample of N=101:

- N=52 Males and N=49 Females;
- N=7 were 10-20yrs old, N=19 were 21-30yrs old, N=26 were 31-40yrs old, N=26 were 41-50yrs old, and N=23 were 51yrs plus;
- N=25 diagnosed at nursery/primary school, N=19 at secondary school, N=33 at university, and N=22 in the workplace
- N=31 with a bachelor degree, N=37 with a bachelor and Master degrees;
- N=44 employed by others, N=39 were self-employed, N=8 unemployed/retired;

Investigative interview study

20 successful diagnosed dyslexic adults were interviewed using an investigative script of 6 main items with a number of sub items. The interviews were conducted using Skype or Facetime allowing for facial prompts to be used, and allowed participants to be put at ease through facial empathy. The interviewer disclosed his own dyslexia to put participants at ease and to explain his own school background. This was felt important as trauma was likely to be discussed.

Interview participants were selected as they had the ability to prove their diagnosis, as each had been diagnosed by either an educational/clinical psychologist or specialist teachers. Evidence was sought to support their diagnosis claims. Data was kept in a secure locked location.

Before the start of each interview the interviewer gave an overview of the project and detailed that any question posed could be omitted and that the interview could be stopped at any time without giving a reason, however none took this option. Names were changed to provide anonymity. Interviewees were asked if they wished to proceed with the interview and all agreed.

The results were digitally audio recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were then sent to participants to check and correct/amend where needed. They were advised that their interviews would not be used in their entirety and would be cut up into themes. They were assured they would receive a copy of any paper or book to check its use.

The interview data was split into questions and sorted, so themes could be located within the data. Quotes were then highlighted and combined to create themes, which were then compared to previous empirical studies for reflection. This was a form of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis-IPA (Smith, 2004) as used successfully in Alexander-Passe (2010, 2015a) to create useful themes for further investigation.

The 20 included:

- N=11 male, N=9 female
- N=1 (10-20yrs), N=1 (21-30yrs), N=7 (31-40yrs), N=5 (41-50yrs), N-6 (51-

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

60yrs)
- N=18 based in the UK, N=2 based in the USA
- N=15 diagnosed by an Educational psychologist, N=5 diagnosed by a specialist teacher
- N=1 diagnosed in pre-school, N=3 diagnosed in primary school, N=5 diagnosed at secondary school, N=4 diagnosed at university, N=7 diagnosed at work
- N=15 no signs of mental health, N=5 had mental health issues

From the sample selected, the following evidence was given of their success:

- Multi-Entrepreneur, started at 13yrs old
- Owns a successful IT website design company
- Owns an IT project consulting company
- Owns a consultancy for police forces
- Owns an Foreign exchange trading company, Multi-Entrepreneur
- Owns a successful disability training company
- Owns a highly successful training charity in prisons
- English teacher with a postgraduate degree
- Film producer, founder of a disability podcast service website
- Engineering project manager
- MBE, social entrepreneur, Owns a building company
- Social entrepreneur, TV apprentice participant
- Award winning TV and Film producer
- Winner of an apprentice TV show, inventor
- Retired Lieutenant Colonel of the US Marines
- One of the youngest Head teachers in the UK
- Developed software to streamline building costs for a large public body
- Learning and Training Manager
- Owns a counselling charity for dyslexics, qualified counsellor
- Social entrepreneur

The sample evidence also found 7 had gained a first degree, and 8 gained a master degree in addition to a first degree. The above evidence of their success and their academic success was deemed sufficient to describe the sample as 'successful dyslexics', according to the criteria indicated earlier.

Results– Interview study

Background

How would someone describe you?

- Participating leader, nurturing, tolerant, trustworthy, loyal, hardworking (PAT)
- Down to earth, humble (PUY)
- Creative, determined, happy, positive, different, quirky (TPE)
- Determined, tenacious, childish, interested, curious, kind, caring, give things a go at most things (SDE)
- Full of passion, enabler of people (EWD)
- Very unpredictable, totally non-linear, won't follow rules, quite short-tempered, emotional (GHD)
- Perfectionist, caring, careful (ESA)
- Intimidating to work with,

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

inaccessible and intellectually challenging, enabler of people (AMJ)
- Hard-working, quite warm, friendly, welcoming, willing to help, can't say no to causes, charismatic, intelligent, creative, cautious, can over analyse problems, incompetent, a thinker (AHD)
- Global thinker, perfectionist, poor attention to detail, good listener, a broad-brush man (ASG)
- Driven, outgoing, draws in trust, loyal (JBB)
- Confident, outgoing, a stickler for detail. I'm pretty headstrong, what you see is what you get (PSS)

The evidence suggests several themes: determination, enabler of people, hard-working, people-skills, global thinking, but challenging to work with due to non-linear thinking and the inability to play by traditional rules.

Home-Life/Supportive Family

- I was perceived as being rather precocious and would ask a lot of questions (PAT)
- I knew I was different, I knew from an early age I questioned things e.g. why are trees tall? No other child I knew asked those, but I didn't stop until I got a good answer (PUY)
- I found like most kids I liked the outdoors, but unlike most kids I would actually find things, like pottery and things from the people that lived a long time ago. I had quite a collection and my parents would boast we had an archaeologist in the family (TBA)
- I think also my parents were quite positive on focusing on what you're good at as well. Not getting worried about being bad at, but getting on with what 're good at, but carry on working hard (TBA)
- What I remember is the amount of input my mom had. She encouraged me to draw and to write diary entries (AHD)
- My mum, she couldn't teach me. I remember she would try and sit down all weekend to help me with my writing or maths, but it just didn't work out. So I was sent to a tutor to hot-house me to pass the exam but not learn the subject (NHN)
- My parents have always been very, very supportive (TPE)
- My mother, I would never have got through school if it hadn't been for her. If I didn't want to go into school, she didn't send me. That's how I coped with school. She always made me do my homework. She used to sit down at the kitchen table with me for 3-4 hours a night.
- It was effort not results that mattered to my mum (PUY)
- Fortunately, I had my mum, who was very supportive, as she was always the antidote to anything that I did wrong at school. If my self-esteem would have gone down, it didn't, because she was so encouraging. It balanced itself out (NHN)
- As a young man my father told me that I had grown out of it (dyslexia) and to stop using it as an excuse. He told me to stop referring myself as being dyslexic, as there was no proof of it, as he had made the school destroy the evidence and

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

threatened them with a lawsuit if they ever called me dyslexic again. So I went through my adult life thinking I had been dyslexic but had grown out of it (TBA)

- My father thought as he could not see dyslexia it was as excuse, my mother thought I was outwardly a very intelligent kid, so thought I was lazy and dumb, and didn't buy into it either. You know back then, to some extent now, it is seen as a crutch for the dumb and lazy (TBA)

The evidence suggests that parents saw they were different early on and were generally supportive, both in academic and non-academic activities. Many tried to teach them but found this very hard and bought in specialist help. What seems to stand out is the mind-set that it was the 'effort' not the 'achievement' that mattered most. This support helped to rebalance the negativity they experienced at school. In one case, parents did not understand the nature of the dyslexic difficulties and were in denial, thus causing secondary stress at home.

School

- When I went into 1st grade the wheels came off and I had a rotten teacher. When she is dead I will dance on her grave, not just once. She was horrible! (TBA)
- The more you hear how stupid you were, and lazy you are, the more it becomes your reality. Lazy & dumb. So I went on, trundled through school, it was horrible. A never ending stream of misery.
- Nobody knew I had difficulties at school (AMJ)
- I was sent to a school for dyslexics, but it just turned out to be a school for un-academic children (JBB)
- We talk about PTSD about soldiers coming back from combat. I have been in combat, but my issues are still with my time at school. I have bad dreams (nightmares) about being in college and thinking about how I will cope. My dreams as a soldier are positive but my dreams of school are never happy, they are dark (TBA)
- Homework for me took hours and hours. Four or five hours when it probably taking one of my mates an hour (PSS)
- Horrible years. Absolutely horrible, I was humiliated by teachers (PAT)
- The way they taught me was to keep asking questions about something and I had no idea what it was they were asking me. So it was done as a form of ritual humiliation in a way (PAT)
- Being told by a teacher 'There's not a lot going in there is there'? (PAT)
- Copying from the board: it was horrendous, I hated it. It was a waste of time for me because I could never take things down fast enough. An absolute waste of time (PUY)
- I have memory of being taken to the front of the class and asked to demonstrate how useless I was at using scissors (NHN)
- I hated it. I hated reading out aloud. My handwriting, necessarily, was therefore also dreadful. I think partly to the fact I didn't know what the letters were I was supposed to write down. I also couldn't read my own writing at all, so couldn't take

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

down notes (NHN)

- The teachers were abusive and unpleasant, I used to plot their destruction (GHD)
- Extremely traumatic, I would go as far as to say abusive, ...getting consistent reinforcement that you are failing time after time without the teachers asking why and helping you (ESA)

In summary, 8 enjoyed school, 12 found school traumatic, and the majority (17) felt they were unsupported at school, while only 3 felt supported

The evidence supports the concept that many dyslexics, in this sample of successful dyslexics, had traumatic school experiences, and that they felt misunderstood by teachers on a daily or hourly basis. Several note how they were plotting their destruction or deaths as a result of the trauma they caused. What shines out is the lack of understanding by teachers and the humiliation that many experienced, with only 8 enjoying school.

Avoidance of tasks

- One tried to do as little as possible, sit at the back of the class or keep one's head down and just hope that, you know, they didn't spot you and say 'will you read the next two paragraphs'. On god, I hated that. So yes, I was consciously trying to avoid reading aloud (JBB)
- I would always try and avoid reading aloud and reading. My friends would joke that I was a comedian, because we'd go into a French lesson (my worst subject) and it's like I just disappeared. I'd walk out and I'd sort of reappear. I made sure I looked like I was attentive and you look down, you look up but you never look at the teacher when he's asking for all sorts of things. You always made sure that you're concentrating, then he didn't pick on you for not concentrating (TPE)
- You just made sure you didn't catch the teacher's eye (TPE)
- It wasn't so much that I chose to write the bare minimum. It's just that I literally, I couldn't figure out how to write more about things sometimes (SDE)
- Teachers lose patients and just think you're trouble rather than you're actually struggling. I was labelled difficult and disruptive in English and French rather than slow (SDE)
- I would shy away from writing (PSS)
- I think it suited me to be the cheeky one at the back of the class making everyone laugh (PAT)
- I would write the absolute minimum I would have to do, so I was not tripped by sentences going awry and wrong (NHN)
- My whole life at school was about not being discovered, keeping my head down and out of trouble, and that fear has stayed with me for 35 years (JEA)
- I coped by not going into school on Mondays and Thursdays, because we had spelling test on those days. One year they made a fuss as I had missed 71 days of school, which they felt was unacceptable (JEA)
- The worst nightmare was reading around the class, so that was a question of distraction to stop it

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

getting to me, not misbehaving, but asking the teacher to explain something, and then something else (JEA)
- I became a master at doing the minimum, and taking any punishment from that. It was a great education in itself (ASG)

The evidence suggests that this sample were creative in their means to survive the continual trauma of mainstream education, in that they used avoidance of reading, writing and spelling to maintain their self-esteem. Avoidance to avoid discovery is noted in several of the quotes, and using camouflaging to avoid detection, fear is noted by many.

Excelling in subjects as a child

- Photography, skiing, sailing (JBB)
- Sports, Art and Design, and selling my ceramics and wheeling dealing (TPE)
- Football and wrestling (TBA)
- Music (SDE)
- Drama, Art & Design (PS & PU)
- Art, design, music (JLA)
- Spoken German (EWD)
- Business ventures, stocks and shares, poker, photography (GHD)
- Sports (AHD)
- Music (AMJ)

N=5 excelled at sport at school, N=7 excelled at drama at school, N=7 excelled at art at school, N=3 excelled at ICT at school

The above evidence suggests that many of this sample enjoyed many forms of success at school, however most were in non-academic subjects, and those areas where careers are not generally created from. However in the case of this sample, it could be argued that this success allowed them to rebalance school-trauma and to develop self-worth.

Working Relationships

Leadership

- People find you, because they look at you and think 'that's interesting; I want to come and work with this team or person'. I'm a manager that wants to empower people (JBB)
- I would always lead from the front, I would always take control of situations (NHN)
- I'm good in situations, but most of the time with people, I'm not very good at that. That was also what others said about me. My daughter tells me 'dad you're not a team-player, are you? (NHN)
- I come up with a vision and pull people with me (EWD)
- I lead from the front by protecting my team (AMJ)
- I'm a marvellous motivator, as a manager I'm motivating 'this is what we're going to do, this is why, it's going to be great'. I inspire people but they get upset as they don't want to let me down. I breed loyalty (AMJ)
- I guess I sometimes lack confidence, I guess it's quite difficult to lead unless I feel confident. I guess it comes back to perfectionism (AHD)

The sense of leadership in this sample is interesting, as it would seem many are

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

effective leaders of people and develop loyalty in their teams, however some lack the people skills to be an all-round leader.

Team-building

- My team building skills are excellent, from school to the battlefield (TBA)
- I'm fairly good at pulling in the right people, and I support their development (PAT)
- I'm very good at leading people, I like to think, and it's because I'm very good at making sure everybody is involved (PUY)
- I'm extremely good at getting teams to succeed and motivating them, but I'm completely exhausting for the people in them. After 4-5 years they feel completely burnt out, so need a rest from me. But quite a lot come back, but more on a part-time basis, because they say they can't physically take the pace and pressure at which I work, 'it's the most enjoyable and exciting part of my life, but I can't live that way, it's too demanding'(GHD)
- I'm able to identify other people's strengths, I don't have an issue working with other dyslexics (PUY)

Several note their people skills, leading and developing/skilling teams so that they can be successful, hence being a motivating element. But where does this ability to know people's strengths come from? We will be looking at 'following your gut' later in this study.

Delegating

- I expect my team to be clairvoyant, which is quite difficult for them. I know exactly what it is I'm communicating, but I don't necessarily express it in a way which they can understand. I tend to think in concepts, but it takes me time to take those concepts and translate them into words. I end up with this incredibility disconnected communication; I wouldn't say I find it easy. (GHD)
- It took me 15 years to realize that everybody else doesn't see the world the same way I see it. I usually make 2 or 3 leaps that are beyond what most people are considering (JLA)
- Sometimes I need to over-explain some things because I have to bring people along my journey of thinking (PSS)
- Nowadays, typically I'll dive in there, solve all the problems that need to be solved to deliver the solution they want. Then I'll cut them up and give them to a techie. If he's lucky he will know how I want to do it the first time. I mentally chop it up into bits that I feel relate and are important and that people can handle, as I can't give them all of it as its too much for them to handle (ASG)
- I build a 3D model of what software I am trying to build, as it allows me to understand it in a global sense and to solve the problems, however I need to chop it up to let others understand my processes and ideas (ASG)
- I'm good at judging people. I've no

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

idea why particularly, but it's a skill I'm blessed with. My last team was 400 people (ASG)

- I'm a global thinker. I'm not the person who can implement ideas, but the person who can drive ideas forward, but I'm not am implementer, so I tend to hire people who can implement, because their skill set is different from me (GHD)
- I'm a brilliant delegator because I can't do anything (AMJ)
- I build a beautiful double helix in 3D but if I'm trying to explain this to linear thinkers it just 'explodes their brains', as I've learned that a lot of people just sit there nodding and smiling but not really getting it, but they don't understand what I'm talking about and then do the wrong thing. I now employ brilliant process people, and then they communicate for ideas to others. (AMJ)
- I always work on the principle 'don't ask someone else to do what you haven't tried to do yourself, because then you appreciate just how hard work it can be' (PAT)
- I'm bad at delegating, because I don't think anyone can see what I'm seeing. When I come up with a solution, nobody can see it the way I see it. For them to work on it with me, I have to take them through my way of seeing it (PUY)
- I know one of my gifts is to have a peripheral view of a problem, peripheral view on how to solve it. Now I only work with non-lateral thinkers because they think like me (PUY)
- It's hard to delegate (TPE)
- It's hard for me to delegate things as I find it hard to keep track of other people's involvement, so I tend to just do things myself, rather than chasing others for progress reports, as it becomes administrative and thus stressful (ESA)
- I don't really delegate, I just do it myself (AHD)

There seems to be a split here in the data, some find delegating hard as they lack the skills to communicate what they need and require, and a second group who are good at delegating as they know they have weaknesses and wish to out-source such tasks. Those who find it hard to delegate tend to 'do it themselves' as its easier that way, however looking at the data more closely these tend to lead smaller organisations or teams, whereas those who are brave enough to delegate run larger organisations. Interesting those who fall between the two groups tend to employ good-process people to translate their non-linear thoughts or ideas (many in 3 dimensional models) into linear ideas so that teams can action what is required.

The evidence also points to communication difficulties, with dyslexics unable to communicate effectively with linear thinkers. They seem to misunderstand why everyone else can't see solutions the way they can.

Following your gut

- I rely on my gut a lot, which is again why I surround myself with people that understand my way of thinking (SDE)

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

- I would like to think I trust my gut, but my gut is informed on the knowledge that I have developed and my experience. I wouldn't say my gut has been wrong a lot, but I don't think you can base every decision on gut (PSS)
- I totally follow and trust my gut (PAT)
- I don't rely on anything else. I don't go by practicality or logic. I just go, if I get a feeling, I follow it 100%. I've lived my whole life like that. Anything I've achieved to date is based on my gut feeling (PUY)
- I really doubt it. I'm more of a scientist and I doubt it, but I'm getting better at trusting it. It's right 50% of the time (TPE)
- My gut instinct is normally wrong as I am not good at judging people and I can create intangibles. I can't read people and I can't see when I'm annoying them (NHN)
- I would argue that it's not my gut I follow, but if we discuss the definition I suspect we would arrive at the conclusion that I use an awful lot of gut. To me its pre-seasoned stuff (ASG)
- I would never go against my gut, ever (ESA)
- The reason my staff struggle with me is because I'm brilliant at knowing the thing that hasn't been done, I'm brilliant at risk analysis, my gut just tells me where to look. I'm naturally a gut person (AMJ)
- My gut is normally right but I don't always follow it (AHD)

Linking to the earlier section on team-building, the ability to know what is right (a person in a team or their skill set) and what the next move should be in a project is argued to come down to intuition or a gut sense. The evidence suggests that dyslexics have good intuition but do not know why. Many trust their gut entirely to lead their projects and to problem-solve.

Working environment

- I guess I need the right environment for myself to work. I have to have a workstation and I like to have everything in exactly the right place that makes sense in my mind, not cluttered. I work best at 3am when I can work without distraction (SDE)
- What I have learned is that if I can control my environment, living life is a lot nicer (PAT)
- I find it very hard working with other people in my office, so I had to wait until they had all gone for me to actually start working. That lead to me working evenings and weekends and eventually I burnt out. Now I have restructured I have my own office, as I know I can easily be distracted. I need silence to work effectively. My team do not understand my agitation in being over-stimulated by all the information that's going on in a busy multi-team office (PAT)
- When I'm under stress, when I need to get something done, I need to be locked in a room (PUY)
- I need constant change. Having one set desk in an office would never fit me (PUY)
- It was terrible for me when we were all moved into open plan offices, as I get distracted easily. I used to go for walks and seeking out quiet spaces to work (NHN)
- I didn't just create the best work

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

environment for me, I created the whole company. (ASG)

- I work best when I ignore everything else around me. I have a strong right-hand man that tells me when I can't ignore certain things anymore (ASG)

Many successful dyslexics in this study are aware of when and where they work best, and this is an awareness of their strengths and weaknesses. The need for silence and a lack of distractions comes through strongly in the evidence. Interestingly some have created organisation to reflect their work-styles.

Motivation

- It's not money, its actually proving a point now. That I can be successful as all my contemporaries in the city, but one step better, better because it's my business and I am running it and I'm CEO and that's my satisfaction every day. To prove to people that this is what I am doing and I am capable of doing it. (JBB)
- It definitely comes from when I was young. Being frustrated at school and feeling a sense of purpose and ability that came from working outside school and earning money, which was more satisfying than sitting down and doing homework (JBB)
- I love the fact that I can control my own world, and that means more to me than anything else (JBB)
- To start with it was partially money and it was partially I wanted to prove all those people wrong about me (PUY)
- Before the apprentice I thought I wanted to be recognised and to be famous, but then I found that very stressful and I hated it. That made me realize it's not fame or success I wanted, but recognition of what I had achieved helping other people identify their potential and strengths (PUY)
- Historically I was always motivated by trying to prove that I was as good as I thought I was, rather than as bad as I looked. Now I think I want to prove that some people were right about me. This definitely dates back to my school years, as some of my headmasters doubts my abilities (TPE)
- I seek recognition of my skills and abilities, and this goes right back to childhood and school. I will work extremely hard to achieve things, but it's recognition I seek most of all. I have a chip on my shoulder about not achieving at school (NHN)
- I seek self-worth, I always had a sense of wanting to be known to be good at something (PSS)
- I'm motivated to provide a good service and my sense of curiosity to research dyslexia, and to inform others about dyslexia. There is so much pain out there and I ask myself how can I change all this craziness in the education system (ESA)
- It's not about money, its gaining self-respect. It just makes me think one of my teachers didn't waste her time on me. It always links back to my school days, being under-rated. (AP)
- It's not about money, it's about

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

helping children who are stuck in the school system not being supported properly. I want to make a difference (AHD)

- I knew I was very driven and that came with recognition and success, which I liked (JBB)
- I don't want to improve things, I want to change things, to rip the heart out of the system and put in something better. Money is not important to me, but change is (AMJ)
- I want to make things better, and to improve how things are done. 50% of the people I help are paying clients (TBA)

This section also relates to a later section on 'entrepreneurship', discussing what motivations are felt by this sample to be successful, and what drives them to do well in business. The evidence seems to suggest that they are motivated to prove themselves, not just to themselves that they are as good as the next person, but also those who doubted their abilities when they were children at school. Many are now motivated to change the world for the better, and to provide the support and the services they would have wanted as children. This sense of a 'chip on their shoulders' is a strong motivating force that should not be discounted in understanding the make-up of the successful dyslexic.

Coping Skills

Do you or have you ever had a mentor?

- No, people seem to find it quite difficult to do that with me. People have often said they find it difficult to give me feedback. It's not because I hit people or anything like that. I wish I had, it hasn't been for the lack of wanting one (JLA)
- It just dawned on me, literally, last week, that actually I don't have anybody guiding me, my career, and where I'm going. That's quite tricky. I've done it for other people, but not managed it in the other direction (JLA)
- I have yes, but not mentors per say. But teachers and the odd mentor in the military. I still talk to my school mentors even though I'm in my 50's. But I have never, never had a true mentor, someone I could rely on (TBA)
- My father once had a conversation with me, saying 'you never had a rabbi' and I said that is true but also I'm not Jewish. He then said 'what I really mean is you have never had a teacher that could lead you through life' and he was right (TBA)
- I've been blessed by mentors and role models through my life, they are my models and I aspire to be like they are (PAT)
- It's got to a point now where for me mentors are not useful anymore because they see a very generic career path of climbing the corporate ladder. I'm not on that career path, so now my main mentor is a life coach (PUY)
- No, but I wish I had. I've had some senior managers who have protected me, but that's different. They know what I'm capable of achieving in the organisation (NHN)
- I would say that it's always been something that's been difficult for

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

me, as it's quite exhausting being me, and for someone to understand how I work. I've always wanted one but I never got one at work. Most people who had one at work succeed in that environment. You needed protection in that corporate environment and to some extent I didn't have that (GHD)

- I suppose I've been lucky, I've had some good bosses who have recognised that I am best left alone to get on with things, as I'm a driven person. However I also have my chairman who is very direct with me and she is my semi-mentor (JBB)

The evidence suggests that many dyslexics find the notion of having a mentor interesting and whilst they would have liked one to protect them, they also recognise that they would have found having one difficult, due to their inability to follow conventional career paths, and that people might find them difficult to manage and to understand. That is not to say that some did not have mentors, but the evidence suggests that this could be a difficult relationship.

Compensation/coping strategies

- When I write slides in PowerPoint for presentations I will naturally include graphics, I won't use loads of words, the main reason is I can't read them fast enough. Images are triggers for me to start things. They trigger a memory, then I won't need to read a script (JLA)
- I just tell people I'm really bad with names. I say 'just send me an email' (JLA)
- I do everything on a PC, I avoid writing, as my writing makes me look mentally retarded. It's terrible, and then you have the spelling part of it (TBA)
- My wife is an extremely good editor, and she puts editorial comments like 'trite' along bits. I have shown unedited bits of my writing to others, and they tell me they can't get by the misspelling, grammar and so forth (TBA)
- The one thing the military helped me a lot to regiment my organisation. I always give myself extra time and projects, by backwards planning and not seeing any problem as insurmountable (TBA)
- I am very proud and will tell people I am dyslexic (TBA)
- I used a clipboard with notes to trigger my thoughts in meetings (PAT)
- I'm naturally messy and totally disorganised, so I spent a lot of time organising, thus my team think I'm very organised, but actually I'm not (PAT)
- I have someone to proof-read for me, then someone else to do all the admin and detail work (TPE)
- When I go to events or parties I rely on my wife to tell me about the people I am about to meet, their names and other important information (NHN)
- I will delegate anything I can to people and pay if needed. I will pay them to do the work I'm not good at. Why struggle for 4 days to do my accounts when an accountant would do it in a morning (NHN)
- I constantly double-check my work

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

as I used to live in fear of being caught, as I didn't tell people I was dyslexic (PSS)
- I read what I write aloud to check it. Then leave it a while and re-read it again to check for missing words and poor spelling. Then I give to someone else to read (PSS)
- I avoid writing notes in meetings, but will record bullet points (PSS)
- Work late in the night to get projects completed (PSS)
- I think the modern form of communication is such a help to dyslexics, thank God I was born in the generation with email, because it's not about using an instrument which is thousands of years old (a pen). I can get away with very concise, short sentences to communicate what you are saying. Modern technology helps me a vast amount (JBB)
- I try and not work too hard, then I end up working 11 hour days (EWD)
- I use Dragon Naturally Speaking to dictate my work (EWD)
- I use an online calendar and am careful not to over-schedule myself (ESA)
- My husband does the shopping, I don't do shopping (ESA)
- I use a highlighter a lot, post-it notes, and paper clips to keep organised (AHD)

The above evidence suggests that many of the study participants understood many of their strengths and weaknesses, and had put in place strategies to cope or to compensate for their weaknesses. Technology such as online calendars, spell-checkers, email and voice recognition software are noted, along with post-it notes, highlighters and using others to proof-read work (as adults still use their mothers to proof-read). Interestingly a few noted the use of visuals in PowerPoint presentations to jog memories of what to say, as they recognise their inabilities to read effectively with speed. Some use avoidance techniques but this seems to be in the minority.

Unique Selling Points (USP)

- I conceptualize everything and then experiment to prove, it's almost a scientific approach. It's theorizing and experimental. I think one of the reasons people think I'm fearless is I'm quite happy to experiment and to be proved wrong. (GHD)
- I would rather tell people the truth and upset people, then lie to make people feel better. What I'm saying is there is a problem that needs to be solved. I can make myself a lot of money because other people are unwilling to ask the questions (GHD)
- I'm quite addicted to change and trying out new things (TPE)
- I'm very aware of what the limitations people have and what difficulties they face (SDE)
- I'm brave, courageous, resilient, creative loyal and very hard-working (PAT)
- I can see beyond what many other people can see to solve problems. I can visualise it in my head and bend it around and see it working (TPE)
- I have intuition. I can go to a

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

brainstorming session and will sit there and listen, then throw out the winning solution. Whilst everyone must go ABCDE, I can co A to E, however I must then walk everyone through my thought processes (TBA)

- Linear thinkers look for differences, but I look for commonalities, their related links. This is the dyslexic intuition (TBA)
- Communication, recognizing products, understanding products, and then being able to articulate that to a certain market or requirement. I understand systems well so I can visualize and manipulate them (JBB)
- I can sense things, I can see things and articulate them well. That's my strength. The downside is saying it to people who don't want to know what I've seen, as it goes contrary to their beliefs/values, as many of the problems are caused by them (NHN)
- I think in pictures and 3 dimensions. I can dissect very fast and solve problems. I work like Google does to collect and solve information, to apply things from one domain to another (JLA)
- I am a really good facilitator (JLA)
- I don't have the same thought processes as everyone else. I look at things differently and this is an alternative approach to problem-solving (JLA)
- I have emotional empathy with people in difficult situations. I understand what emotional pain is (AMJ)
- I have the ability to see things from a global perspective and communicate effectively to senior leadership, but also have enough knowledge to communicate effectively to programmers and the workforce, both the 3000 foot and the 30 foot views.

A question to the heart of the project, what is it that makes a dyslexic unique in business? The evidence suggests an ability to see and solve problems differently to others, specifically the ability to conceptualise in 'their minds eye' in three dimensions, however find it hard to translate this into linear parts for others to solve (see the earlier section on delegating). Evidence also suggests that successful dyslexics can make leaps in their solving of problems, hence A to Z without the need for A, B, C, D, E etc. Again linear thinkers need to be walked through the dyslexic's thought process to get to the end solution. Some might suggest this is divergent or creative thinking but again this might come down to gut intuition. Empathy is noted, in that they have the ability to relate to others struggling with problems, their abilities to know a person's strengths and weaknesses and utilize them effectively, and lastly the ability to communicate to both senior leaders and workers effectively. Lastly it is noted the willingness to ask the difficult questions and to not be afraid to question perceived wisdom and convention, in their striving to find new solutions to old or emerging problems.

Traits

Dealing with risk

- I will take risks, damn right, I will take risks that people would

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

consider somewhere close to effing horrendous. I don't focus on consequences. You evaluate risk, so I have a high tolerance for risk (ASG)

- One of the biggest risks is not trying at all. Actually if you don't try, you'll never know if it was a good idea (TPE)
- Risk is good, however risk without thought is dangerous (PAT)
- I do take risks setting up this charity, I think part of it was due to ignorance as well. If I were to look back, if I had known what I would need to know in order to do what I have achieved, I probably would never have done it. I tend to deal with problems as they surface (PAT)
- I am happy to take a risk to do things if I think that would make a difference, I am happy to take on risks (NHN)
- I think risk is something I don't like, but I think it's unavoidable for dyslexics. Your whole life is waiting to be 'found out' at any moment. You're so familiar with what it feels like, either to anticipate it or to be in that horrible moment when the wheels just come off in life. You really fear but, so it drives you (JLA)
- I don't avoid it, I would say I have calculated risk. I take more risks than most (PSS)
- I think in order to get what you want it takes a considerable amount of risk, I think I'm more likely to do it. I don't care what other people think (ESA)
- I'm a risk-taker without a shadow of doubt, I think 'what have I got to lose' (JBB)
- I don't like it and I absolutely try and avoid it. However of you in the business I'm in, then risk is part of business, it's how much comfort you have taking the risks, how you manage it, and what comfort level can you go (JBB)

Coping with failure

- I always say, in order to succeed in life, you must fail first because you will never understand the taste of success unless you fail. For me, failure is an experience. In order to celebrate success, you must go through the depths of failure (PUY)
- Failure is a journey, it's inevitable, but the most important thing is don't fail at the same way twice (TPE)
- Those who have never failed at school find failure as an adult really hard, as they never had the opportunity to fail as children. I think failure is bad, but at least I've done it a lot so at least I know it's not life threatening (TPE)
- I think some of it is I'm not afraid to fail as I have failed so many times before. So I'm not frightened of failure (TBA)
- It's a journey. One person said to me, there's no such thing as failure, there's results you didn't want (SDE)
- I think there's no such thing as failure, really. You always learn and who you are equating yourself with when you say you are a failure. In the eyes of someone else maybe you wouldn't see yourself as a failure. I view myself as courageous having stepped forth when I made mistakes, but I learn from every mistake I make (PAT)
- I'm used to failure, so I don't mind

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

failing, and I don't even mind public failing (NHN)

- I welcome failure and define it as 'learning taking place'. My parents always taught be to 'have a go'. In America if you fail at a business they say 'at least you had a go', in the UK they call you a 'bankrupt' (NHN)
- Failure is important. I think I have more 'grit' for long-term projects and perseverance, because I don't expect to be the best at something when I begin, or expect to get it right first time. I have spent many many years being forced to do things I'm not good at [at school] that I'm adamant about not being in that position again (ESA)
- I don't think you can avoid failure. You can try to be in control of everything but failure can still happens, I suppose it's what you do with that failure (EWD)
- Peter Stringfellow said one of the best things that happened to him was leaving school without any qualifications, because there were no expectations on him. He could tray whatever he wanted and failure wasn't a big deal because he wasn't expected to achieve anything (SDE)

In summary, 16 felt that failure was an essential part of success, 2 did not, and 2 were undecided

Relating to the 'USP' section, the ability for many of this sample of dyslexics to 'deal with risk' and 'cope with failure' is investigated. Most indicate the willingness to take on risk, and some relate this back to their childhood and schooling, in that they learnt to effectively cope (emotionally) with risk and failure. Some relate to the lifelong failure of being found out as being dyslexic, in school and in the workplace, and expecting to be fired as a result. Others see failure as part of a 'learning journey' as many had failed so much at school that they had almost become immune to the negative emotional effects of failure. Interestingly they note they were more willing to risk to gain success, compared to non-dyslexic peers who were risk-adverse and were less successful in life, where failure was avoided at all costs. The majority however note that failure was an essential aspect of their later success in life.

Hard-working/passion

- I work close to 17 hours a day, but that when the family are not around (GHD)
- One of my biggest strategies is to work until it's done. It's not uncommon for me to work until 2-3 in the morning. Occasionally I work all night (JLA)
- I tend to work 12 hour days, but then can cram to get a project finished (TPE)
- I put my whole heart into things when I do things, because my passion is important to me and important to my success (PUY)
- I am pretty persistent (TPE)
- My whole life is setting a goal and doing it. Why else get out of bed in the morning (TBA)
- I am very very highly focussed. I'm all or nothing. If I switch onto something all consuming, my thoughts for weeks. I'm immersed in

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

topics as I have to know everything about it. I bore my friends and wife about it in every conversation (NHN)

- I've got a relentless drive to work past stubborn people who say 'no' to me, and wear then down or go around them. If they say 'no' because it's never been done that way before', 'we have always done it this way', or 'no because I out-rank you' then that's not good enough for me (NHN)
- I thinks it's due to our determination that we will find a way. I may not have the solution now but by the end of the day I will (JBB)
- I get very frustrated when people give excuses as to why they haven't done things (JBB)
- I think it's very challenging for a lot of people to multi-task, and particularly multi-task probably in the way I do. I think it's a trait of dyslexics that we can multi-task (JBB)
- Most people I know say they are in awe of me and they say they couldn't do all the things I do or have achieved (EWD)

The whole sample noted their passion they have for their work and their willingness to work extremely hard to achieve success in life. Their persistence to not give up and to 'work until the job is done' is testament to why they have achieved in life. The term 'passion' sums up their all-consuming need to understand and solve problems that go beyond the normal 'call of duty' of most people/employers. Their willingness to work extremely long days demonstrates their determination in life.

Are dyslexics over-achievers?

- Yes, and I can't just do one thing, I'll always have new ideas. When dyslexics achieve a degree, they often feel even more driven to do more. I want to show everyone they were wrong about me and how bright I am, as we can cope with more than one things at a time (PUY)
- I would say I'm an over-achiever but sometimes also a perfectionist. My friends tell me I'm doing too much, everyone tells me I don't get enough sleep because I work too hard (SDE)
- I find it very hard to multi-task and a few years ago I burnt myself out taking too many things on (PAT)

In summary, 10 think dyslexics tend to be over-achievers, and 5 do not think so

This interesting question found that whilst many of the successful dyslexics in this sample could be described as 'over-achieving' very few of them recognise it in themselves. However the survey data only found 50% felt that dyslexics tended to be over-achievers in life.

Creativity and Entrepreneurship

Are you creative?

- Everything I do is based on creativity. The reason I got away from working for other people (in the army and consulting) and started up my own company, as I would come up with these incredible ideas and companies wouldn't take them on, as they

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

weren't creative and didn't want to take on the risk (TBA)
- I have different ways to solve problems. I nearly automatically am able to analyse and pick out the best solution very quickly (PUY)
- I solve problems by coming up with many ideas (TPE)
- I am highly motivated to understand things, and to figure out how I can use it in way that suits me, and that is enjoyable and interesting (JEA)
- Solutions just keep on rolling out. If I sit down I can think up so many things off the topic. At school I can come up with 10 ideas when others have only come up with 3. I couldn't believe how slow they were, then I realized, no they just people can't think, or they self-edit too much (NHN)
- I am very creative, be it in the theatre, education or as a writer (AMJ)
- I think I'd say I'm definitely creative. I get a massive pleasure from creating (AHD)

Evidence suggests that many of sample felt that in their work and problem-solving, that this was a creative process, or that creativity described what they did and how they worked.

Entrepreneurship

- It's not about making money, it's about making the world better (EWD)
- I'm an entrepreneur as it allows me to realise my thoughts and ideas, allowing me to focus on the things I'm good at (JLA)
- It's not about money; it's about creating justice and equality for everybody. Making sure that the [dyslexic] children of our future don't go through what we've gone through (PUY)
- I'm not driven by money, it's about self-discovery and pushing my abilities (PSS)
- I'm not motivated by money, I'm motivated by providing a really great service and providing a place where people can really be helped. I hate seeing people not meet their full potential. Providing a service that was not available to me growing up (SDE)
- It's not about money, it's about social justice. When I set up this enterprise what I was actually creating was an environment that I as a teenager would have wanted to have been offered, but didn't have the opportunity to receive as it didn't exist. I was setting this up as a coming from an injured place (PAT)
- I yearned for a wider opportunity to prove myself, and yes of course like everyone else I loved the fluidity of money and the opportunity that money brings (JBB)
- I have to work for myself as I can't work for anyone else. It would be unfair to put anyone with me, even though I have worked in a national organisation for 30 years, or should I say I have survived them for 30 years, or they have survived working with me (NHN)
- I have deliberately created an environment in which I feel comfortable working in. It's a case now that because of the person I

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

am, the skill set I have, and the attitude that I have, that I can't work for anyone else now (ASG)

- I am definitely motivated to make things better. It's not about money, it's tremendously difficult making money building and running wind-farms (GHD)
- It's not money, it's fun, and I'm lucky it makes me money at the same time (ASG)

Relating to the question on 'motivation', the sample indicated that money was not a main motivation to work for themselves. What seems to be evident is: their need for the freedom and resources to put their ideas in motion, the need to prove self-worth/abilities to others, the need to create services that were lacking from when they were children struggling at school, and the need to make the world better, be it wind-farms or creating social justice. There is also evidence that many felt unable to work for others, and working for themselves seemed to be the only real option open to them for personal happiness/well-being.

School Trauma as a Life Motivation

- People say I'm unpredictable, but I say this is learned behaviour from school. I would just fight back if I was bullied or teachers unfairly picked on me. If people question me in a certain way, I emotionally just start seeing that chain of events again. It's just a feeling of being picked on again (GHD)
- Many dyslexics have 'chips on their shoulder's to motivate them to do things in life (PAT)
- Some of the dyslexics I meet are motivated to do well because of traumatic schooling, but not all of them (SDE)
- Some dyslexics I've met have gone to the n'th degree to prove that they are not stupid (SDE)
- I think I grew up with the drive to do well, even as though things were okay around me, I still had a sense that I was at the bottom of the pit, and I didn't want to stay there (JLA)
- I think I was simply driven to bounce back from failure. I got used to failing, and I got used to picking myself up again as best I could, because I hated it. That's what drove me as a child and a young adult (JLA)
- Looking back to my trauma at school, I always say 'I have to thank them because I would never have done as good as I have without that experience' (PUY)
- I think for everyone that gets a push to prove others wrong, there are several hundred that are emotionally damaged for the rest of their lives (ESA)
- I listen to successful [dyslexic] entrepreneurs that have struggled with dyslexia, often not knowing that it was their dyslexia they were struggling with, or not fully processing their experiences. Even though you can be very very successful, you can still be dealing with the impact of stress and school -trauma (ESA)
- Every time I failed at school I was able to say that Richard Branson also failed at school and has built a hugely successful company. That's really what got me through the

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

worst of it and where I am today (ESA)

- I absolutely hated the state school system, and I was determined above everything else, to give 2 fingers to the school. I walked out of that gate and the only thing I wanted to do was to go back in a Rolls Royce and tell them to F*** off. That was my main motivation and determination (GHD)
- I wanted to prove that I was as good as the next person, washing cars, selling and working in the city (JBB)
- It's a bit of a nag at the back of my head, being told at school 'I can't do it' and now I say 'look at me now' (PSS)
- Trauma at school is never good, I've seen enough of it myself (AHD)
- Yes I have a chip on my shoulders about not doing well at school. I'm described as a workaholic, but is it because of school (ASG)

In summary, 14 think they need to prove themselves to others, and 3 do not think so, but 17 felt successful dyslexics don't enjoy school

The evidence points to school-failure being a motivating element in this sample's success, that there was a need to show self-worth and to not only prove others wrong, but to 'shove' it in their faces that they harshly miss-judged them. It is recognised that trauma at school was never good, but it could be argued it was a main motivating force for them. However was school-trauma the only factor in their success?

What would I have been without school-trauma?

- If I would have been happier at school I would have ended up being a completely different person, contented with life and being in a normal job (GHD)

- What would I have been if I would have been supported and un-traumatised by school, just a housewife with seven children, just like my mother? So not a successful author and playwright (PMS)

Questioned about the 'what if' they hadn't experienced school trauma, two noted that they would possibly not have been as successful, but likely to have been more contented with life. So was their school trauma the key factor in their success?

Creating successful dyslexics

- I know other kids [likely to be dyslexic] who had the same background as me, didn't have my positive re-enforcements or parents that engaged with them, didn't have the support network at school, had the same problems as me. But they don't have the drive to do well in life (PSS)
- I believe the secret to teaching 'grit' and resilience is teaching how to fail. I look back in my life at the stupid and embarrassing things I have done. Given the chance I would still do them again because of the learning that took place, what I got from those things, even though they were painful (TBA)

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

- Dyslexics in prison lacked finding out what they were good at, at school (PUY)

The crux to the project was to find positive messages for educators, parents and young dyslexics. The evidence suggests that harnessing failure positively helps to develop resilience and grit, along with the positive support by parents, not just academically but in the journey to locate and harness strengths.

Sending a child to a dyslexic school

- I think dyslexic children would be better in a dyslexic school as they would know they aren't stupid (NHN)
- My eldest goes to a dyslexic school. One of my fears about it was that it would be a great place for failure, because your sense of self would come out intact (JLA)

The project questioned whether sending a dyslexic child to a specialist school was a good thing, however too few responses were gained to really understand their views. However a higher self-esteem is suggested, but would this be enough to develop the 'grit' they needed for post-school success?

Why am I successful?

- Hard work, perseverance, creativity, computers.
- I am successful because I have worked hard to overcome my learning difficulties using technology - within weeks I taught others to use computers. I now run a successful charity.
- Entrepreneurial, enthusiastic and creative thinker.
- Despite being late diagnosed and having a traumatic experience in school, I still completed my degree and masters, worked for 2 FMCG companies, started my own business and appeared on the UK Apprentice. Above all that I now understand my dyslexia and I understand how to use it as a strength.
- Some combination of intelligence and determination -but currently facing huge challenges and stress at work-so the future is very uncertain
- I started a business aged 13; I've been in over 100 magazine and newspapers in three years, good pals with lots of celebrities.
- I had a very fulfilling 30 year career in the police and now run a training company. The company has always been in profit.
- I have persevered, despite times of utter exhaustion, to do my job well. I have displayed grit.
- I work for myself, I taught myself computers and design websites and do graphic design and now I teach it,
- More by accident than deliberately I have been able to create a life/ work style that happily accommodates my dyslexic weaknesses and delight in my dyslexic strengths, and extremely hard work.
- Coped with dyslexia, proved people wrong who said I couldn't do things
- Because I'm determine to raise awareness and stop others going

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

- through what we've been through I have achieved a degree and 2 masters degrees (my last one gaining a distinction for my dissertation) I also was appointed as one of the youngest head teachers in the country 3 years ago. I also have grade 8 piano, horn and music theory and was a finalist in the young composer of the year.

In summary, 19 call themselves successful, and 20 are called successful by others. 13 were self-employed, 5 were senior managers, 4 were professionals. 13 work for themselves, and 7 work for others.

The quotes above have not been labelled with participant names to aid the confidential nature of this study. They do however indicate from the survey data why they described themselves as being

Table 1. How does dyslexia affect you? Tick as many as relevant

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Short-term memory (I forget things easily)	79.6%	78
Slow reader (or rarely reads)	68.4%	67
Disorganisation (I create piles to read, file away or pay bills)	67.3%	66
Problems with fine motor skills (tying knots/laces)	28.6%	28
Easily confused (I can't focus sometimes)	52.0%	51
Just can't understand things (things don't always make sense to me)	34.7%	34
Poor spelling ability	66.3%	65
Messy handwriting	56.1%	55
Problem recalling words (e.g. names or spellings)	73.5%	72
Not good at writing (so avoid taking messages)	42.9%	42
Not good at maths	38.8%	38
Can't follow a shopping list	7.1%	7
Can't follow written instructions	20.4%	20
Can't use a dictionary or A to Z (to look up words)	18.4%	18
Clumsy (I fall over or knock and break things a lot)	37.8%	37
Fear of making mistakes and being laughed at	56.1%	55
answered question		**98**
skipped question		**3**

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

successful, and it is easy to agree with them that they have achieved success by most standards. Some point to fame, others to proving self-worth, and lastly to create paid employed that works to their strengths. Success is subjective, but 19 call themselves successful with the majority (13) recognising that being self-employed was the means for their success, as Frank Sinatra sang 'doing it my way'.

Results – online survey study

Not all 30 items of the survey are included in this paper due to space, but the following are used to reflect the results of the interview study.

Table 1 data suggests that short-term memory, slow reading, problem-recalling names/facts and disorganisation are main problems still affecting adults with dyslexic, and demonstrating that dyslexia

Table 2. What strategies do YOU use to cope with YOUR dyslexia? Tick all that are relevant

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Computer reader or text to speech software	48.4%	46
Rely on a computer to write everything	51.6%	49
Use a spell checker	78.9%	75
Write in pencil and then go over in pen	17.9%	17
Avoid forms	40.0%	38
Avoid reading (saying 'I have forgotten my glasses etc.)	29.5%	28
Get others to do things for you (Getting others to compete forms for you)	38.9%	37
Use organisation software	30.5%	29
Rely on a notepad or diary to record your life	47.4%	45
Dictaphone/Audio typist	21.1%	20
Proof reader	47.4%	45
answered question		**95**
skipped question		**6**

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

Table 3. Did you enjoy school or was it traumatic?		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
Traumatic	65.1%	54
Enjoyed school	34.9%	29
Other (please specify)		20
answered question		**83**
skipped question		**18**

Table 4. At school did YOU excel in any non-academic subject?		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
Sport	36.9%	31
Drama	31.0%	26
Art & Design	50.0%	42
IT	15.5%	13
Other	32.1%	27
answered question		**84**
skipped question		**17**

Table 5. Would OTHERS describe you as successful?		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
Yes	83.9%	73
No	16.1%	14
Other (please specify)		13
answered question		**87**
skipped question		**14**

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

Table 6. Do you think YOU were supported by teachers at school?		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
No	72.4%	63
Yes	27.6%	24
Other (please specify)		12
	answered question	**87**
	skipped question	**14**

Table 7. How would YOU define if someone was successful? Tick as many as relevant		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
Has a large and well-furnished home	11.8%	11
Are in a prestigious job	32.3%	30
Wears expensive clothes or jewellery	3.2%	3
Earns lots of money	29.0%	27
Has a job	33.3%	31
Enjoys their job	81.7%	76
Works for themselves	34.4%	32
Are in a senior position at work	37.6%	35
Are married	31.2%	29
Have children	31.2%	29
Have a degree	24.7%	23
Went to university	20.4%	19
Work from home	10.8%	10
Have a good work-life balance	82.8%	77
Be famous	9.7%	9
Travel abroad regularly	19.4%	18
	answered question	**93**
	skipped question	**8**

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

goes beyond childhood and school-classrooms.

Table 2 data suggests vast majority use spellcheckers, use of a computer and assisted technology to help them cope with modern life, however several non-technological strategies and tools are used along with avoidance of forms and writing.
Table 3 data found the majority commented that school was traumatic for them, reflecting the results of the interview study.

Table 4 data reflecting the results of the interview study, as many of the dyslexics surveyed experienced success in non-academic school subjects, and this is hypothesised to assist in their belief that they have self-worth.

Table 5 interestingly most recognised that others would call themselves successful, however the study also found that only 68 of the 73 noted above would call themselves successful with 8 giving reasons for not feeling successful, these include questioning what was success and noting past business failures, however it could be argued an unsuccessful dyslexic would not have even attempted such business ventures.

Table 6 found that many from the survey felt unsupported as children at school, and reflected the results of the interview study.

Interestingly Table 7 investigated perceptions of success, the study did not define success (on purpose) but wanted to understand what participants understood about success. The highest results were that 76 felt that job satisfaction and 77 having a good work-

Table 8. What do YOU think drives someone to be successful? Tick as many as relevant

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
The need for money	39.8%	37
The need for fame	21.5%	20
The need of a job	36.6%	34
To prove to their self-worth	78.5%	73
To prove to others you are right	45.2%	42
To not work for someone else	31.2%	29
To regain control of your life	65.6%	61
To prove their intelligence	57.0%	53
To improve the world	58.1%	54
answered question		**93**
skipped question		**8**

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

Table 9. Some people believe that failure is an essential part of gaining success, do you agree?		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
Yes-a lot	57.1%	52
Yes-a little	31.9%	29
Neither yes nor no	6.6%	6
No-a little	4.4%	4
No-alot	0.0%	0
Other (please specify)		5
answered question		**91**
skipped question		**10**

Table 10. Do YOU think successful dyslexics enjoyed their time at school?		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
Yes	2.9%	2
No	97.1%	68
Other (please specify)		24
answered question		**70**
skipped question		**31**

life balance were important, compared to only 23 having a degree, 30 having a prestigious job and 27 having lots of money.

Table 8 looked at success motivation. The results interestingly reflect the interview study, in that 73 had a need to prove self-worth (53 to prove their intelligence, 42 to prove they were right) and 61 wanted to regain control of their life. Again money was a low motivational factor (37).

In table 9 the results indicated overwhelmingly that participants thought that failure was essential for success in dyslexics, reflecting the interview study.

Lastly in Table 10, the results investigated school enjoyment. The majority note that most successful dyslexics did not enjoy school, from the 24 that answered other, such answers were non-committal.

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

Discussion

This paper was intended to investigate if school trauma was a trigger for post-school success, and two theories were proposed: the disability paradox and post traumatic growth.

The interview evidence supports the hypothesis that most (but not all) successful dyslexics experience a troubled schooling, and this can create the motivation to prove themselves to others. School can be a harsh environment for a dyslexic who has difficulty reading, writing and spelling amongst many other difficulties. The evidence suggests high avoidance strategies to camouflage such difficulties (e.g. hiding in class, forgetting books/ homework), the other option is to either submit to the humiliation of not being able to read effectively as their peers, to use distraction (e.g. being the class clown) or truancy (e.g. calling in sick to avoid tests). This teaches dyslexics to be creative and to use divergent means to maintain their self-esteem, however the evidence still suggests school–trauma is experienced. Both Fitzgibbon & O'Connor (2002) and Albertson (2001) note the camouflaging of difficulties by dyslexics in school, and Belzberg (2013), Foss (2015), Bort (2014), Tickle (2015) echo the humiliation experienced by dyslexics at school by teachers.

Many point to school as being their motivation to so well in life 'to return to school in a Roll Royce to show them they were wrong' (GHD). This indicates the need to demonstrate self-worth to those whose opinion mattered to them, their peers and parents; maybe they felt a need to also show their parents that they were in fact able to hold down a job and be a success. However the evidence also indicates that many dyslexics are over-achievers, working long hours on a multitude of projects and businesses to keep on achieving beyond the level of their peers, thus keeping on fighting even when they have proven to others their worth. The need to go beyond such levels is likely to come from proving to themselves their own potential and worth.

Abilities to create a vision and pull people along and the problems in delegating effectively due to communications problems were found in this study; however some were very effective despite building large organisations. Those who were good at delegating tended to appreciate their lack of abilities and that others who were better skilled were the ones with greater commercial growth, as also found by Branson (2015), Foss (2015), Cass (2011), Logan (2009, 2010), Clarkson (2015) and Tickle (2015). As Coppola (2007) notes of one successful dyslexic 'my secret was to get out of the way and let them do their job'.

The interview evidence suggests that successful dyslexics are highly creative, to come up with many solutions to everyday problems, but also indicated difficulty turning their problem-solving (e.g. in the evening after work and at bed time). One participant found the only way of really coping with his creative edge was to work for himself, as previous companies were unwilling to pay him to express his creativity and develop various products. Thus the majority were self-employed, as only they believed in themselves with their

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

need for their constant experimentation of ideas. This also led them to create working environments that were dyslexic-friendly (Cass, 2011, Logan, 2010, Alexander-Passe, 2015a; Fitzgibbon & O'Connor, 2002, and Inskeep, 2007).

The majority of the interview participants solved problems using gut intuition, many in three dimensions, reflecting the work by Thomas West (2004) with his book 'In the mind's eye'. Using intuition and empathy to effective manage staff and spearhead decisions have also been reported by Fink (2015). This led to clear unique differences between them and their peers, and gave them an edge in business. The results of this study, indicating advanced three dimensional modelling (visual-spatial) and the ability to think differently was also found by Logan (2010) and West (2004). Many noted the ability to solve problems faster by going from A to Z in seconds, rather than having to go through each step separately (also noted by Bort, 2014), whether this is through creative or divergent logic is another question?

Risk and attitude to risk found in this study indicate that dyslexics are far more willing to take risk, some large ones as failure is not feared, as they experienced so much of this growing up, and had developed resilience as a result. Logan (2010), Bridge (2015), Seward (2014) have also highlighted this factor. This also relates to the persistence that Kopf (2013), Alexander-Passe (2015a) and Fink (2002, 2015) noted in their studies, to not give up and the determination to drive concepts through to fruition.

Conclusion

This study started with a literature review of dyslexia and began a journey looking at success and a means to understand why many dyslexics achieve success against the odds. Theories of 'the disability paradox' and 'post-traumatic growth' were used posed to integrate non-dyslexia thinking into the world of dyslexia. To make sense of the paradox of why dyslexics can experience high school-failure, but can also achieve huge post-school success?

The study used an online survey to firstly recruit interview subjects for an in-depth study but also to gain a wider sense of success amongst dyslexics. 56 volunteered to be interviewed, and the first 20 of a projected N=25 are detailed in this paper.

The results of the two studies are reflected, and tell a message of trauma and hardship at school, with most reporting humiliation and the lack of understanding by school educators. However a minority experienced support from a select group of teachers, who sometimes turned into life-long mentors. School was found by both studies to be a harsh place for dyslexics to exist in with many feeling unsupported.

Of the successful dyslexics interviewed, many experienced high levels of parental support, and demonstrated excellence in non-academic subjects at school (art, design, drama, sport etc.) which gave them a means to balance the negativity they found in the classroom.

All survived school and many went on to

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

achieve success at university with both bachelor and master's degrees, however this assisted many to gain diagnosis for their dyslexia; with others being identified in the workplace. The survey found only 43% were diagnosed at school compared to 45% in the interview sub group.

In the workplace many dyslexics found they had abilities to problem-solve, but lacked the abilities to easily communicate their ideas to others, finding that messages were garbled and their promotion prospects were restricted. A few noted their abilities to lead and build effective teams, however the need to break down information into chunks for linear thinkers was also found.

Views on risk and failure were sought, finding that many dyslexics were very used to taking risks in life, as many had used high levels of camouflage to hide their reading, writing and spelling difficulties at school. They also noted that they were used to failure, and used it as a positive learning tool in life, as they noted that they had failed so often at school that they were emotionally detached from it. They noted this as a difference to their peers in the workplace that were so risk-adverse that they avoided failure at all costs, and thus tended to be less successful as a result.

Motivations for success was investigated with many noting that money was not a main motivator for them, but the need to prove themselves, a need to provide services that they would have needed as children at school, and a need to prove others wrong. The links to school were still evident as successful adults, leading to questions about post-traumatic growth.

Was suffering in mainstream school a positive element in their success as adults? The results seem to suggest that school suffering was a main element, however other factors such as supportive parents and experiencing childhood success, surpassing that of their peers was also important.

Limitations

The survey data was sourced from self-disclosing individuals who identified themselves as dyslexic, thus caution should be used in generalizing from the data, however generalized themes were its main intention.

The interview study data is in its early analysis stage and further investigations with IPA and other models will be used to uncover greater insights.

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

Interview Study Sample

Figure 1. Interview Script

1. Are you happy to proceed? YES/NO
2. Are you dyslexic? Who FIRST diagnosed it and at what age were you?
3. How would someone else describe you?
4. Tell me about your home life growing up? Siblings? Parents divorced?
5. Is anyone else in your family dyslexic?

Tell me about your time at school?

Trauma (resilience and motivation) / mental health difficulties
Difficulties were treated negatively
Under-achievement (was not supported)
Aptitude for business success
Excelling in non-academic subjects

Tell me about your working relationship with people?

Leadership
Creating a vision and carry people with you-
Team-building skills
People Skill
Intuition (people skills and empathy)

What coping skills do you now use?

Delegation skills
Find and use mentors & Role models (self-esteem/self-belief)
Support networks (awareness of strengths & weaknesses)
Self-awareness (knowing your strengths & weaknesses)
Creating your own working environment
Compensation skills
Dyslexia-awareness, not dyslexic-denial
Developing self-worth (motivation)

What are your unique selling points (USP)?

What traits do you have?

Risk (willing to risk)
Failure is not an option (resilience from failure)
Business intuition (finding the core elements to focus on)
Reasoning skills (making sense of tasks)
Pursuing your passions (energy and conviction)
Passions drive an interest to improve literacy skills
Not taking no for answer (perseverance/ persistence) – self-belief
Extreme focus/goal-orientation (determination)
Over-achieving in life (not be contented with their lot)
Mental Health difficulties
Optimism

Would you call yourself a creative thinker?

Creativity or divergent thinking (solving problems)
Entrepreneurship (improving the world)

If school-trauma created your success, should we avoid sending dyslexics to special schools?

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

Bibliography

Albertson, C. (2001). Backwards and Wearing Heels: Conversations about Dyslexia, Ceramics and Success, Marilyn Zurmuehlen *Working Papers in Art Education:* Vol. 2001: Iss. 1, Article 2. Retrieved 10th February 2015. // ir.uiowa.edu/mzwp/vol2001/iss1/2

Albrecht, G. L., & Devlieger, P. J. (1999). The disability paradox: High quality of life against all odds. *Social Science & Medicine, 48*, 977–988.

Alexander-Passe, N. (2010). *Dyslexia and Depression: The Hidden Sorrow*. New York: Nova Science Publishers.

Alexander-Passe, N. (2012). *Dyslexia: Dating, Marriage and Parenthood*. New York: Nova Science Publishers.

Alexander-Passe, N. (2015a). *Dyslexia and Mental Health: Helping people to overcome depressive, self-harming and other adverse emotional coping strategies.* London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Alexander-Passe, N. (2015b). Investigating Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Triggered by the Experience of Dyslexia in Mainstream School Education? *J Psychol Psychother 5*: 215. doi: 10.4172/2161-0487.1000215

Ambler, G. (2013) *How do you define success?* Retrieved 1st October 2011. http://www.georgeambler.com/how-do-you-define-success/

American Psychological Association (2015a). *Post-traumatic Stress Disorder* Retrieved 30th September 2015. http://www.apa.org/topics/ptsd/

American Psychological Association (2015b). *Post-traumatic Stress Disorder Fact sheet* Retrieved 30th September 2015. http://www.dsm5.org/Documents/PTSD%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf

Antonovsky, A. (1987). *Unraveling The Mystery of Health - How People Manage Stress and Stay Well,* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers

Belzberg, L. (2013). *Can Dyslexics Succeed at School or Only in Life?* Huffington Post. 04/22/2013. Retrieved 10th February 2015). http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lisa-belzberg/can-dyslexics-succeed-at-_b_2718579.html

Bort, J. (2014). *Cisco CEO John Chambers: My Dyslexia Is A Weakness AND A Strength.* Business insider. July 24, 2014. Retrieved 10th February 2015. http://www.businessinsider.com/cisco-ceo-john-chambers-talks-dyslexia-2014-7#ixzz3RI4UJesz

Bower, J. E., Kemeny, M. E., Taylor, S. E., & Fahey, J. L. (1998). Cognitive processing, discovery of meaning, CD4 decline, and AIDS-related mortality among bereaved HIV-seropositive men. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 66*, 979-986

Branson, R. (2015). *Richard Branson on Learning to Delegate.* Entrepreneur. January 19, 2015. Retrieved 13th February 2015. http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/241450

Bridge, R. (2015). *Small Business - The mind of an entrepreneur: Childhood shapes the future whiz-kids. Rachel Bridge discovers the secrets of how to make your first million.* Retrieved 10th February 2015. http://www.gifteddyslexic.com/dyslexia-information/successful-gifted-dyslexics/dyslexia—the-secret-of-success

Cadell, S., & Sullivan, R. (2006). Posttraumatic growth and HIV bereavement: Where does it start and when does it end? *Traumatology, 12*, 45–59. doi:10.1177/153476560601200104

Calhoun, L. G., & Tedeschi, R. G. (2006). The foundations of posttraumatic growth: An expanded framework. In L. G. Calhoun & R. G. Tedeschi (Eds.), *The handbook of posttraumatic growth: Research and practice* (pp. 1-23). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Calhoun, L.G., & Tedeschi, R.G. (2001). Posttraumatic growth: The positive lessons of loss. In: *Meaning Reconstruction and the Experience of*

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

Loss, R.A. Neimeyer, pp. (157-172), American Psychological Association, Washington, DC.

Cass (2011). *Why people with dyslexia are successful in business.* Cass Business School. 02 February 2011. Retrieved 10th February 2015. http://www.cass.city.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/2011/february/why-people-with-dyslexia-are-successful-in-business

Clarkson, N. (2015). *Richard Branson: How to delegate when launching a business Virgin*. 11 February 2015. Retrieved 14th February 2015. http://www.virgin.com/entrepreneur/richard-branson-how-to-delegate-when-launching-a-business

Connally, P., 1994. The California quality of life project: A project summary. In: Goode, D. (Ed.), *Quality of Life for Persons with Disabilities*. Brookline Books, Cambridge, pp. 184±192.

Dyslexia Action (2013). *Dyslexia and Literacy Difficulties: Policy and Practice Review A consensus call for action: why, what and how?* Retrieved 30th September 2015. http://www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk/files/dyslexiaaction/dyslexia_action_-_dyslexia_and_literacy_difficulties_policy_and_practice_review._a_consensus_call_for_action_why_what_and_how.pdf

Dyslexia Institute (2005). *The Incidence of Hidden Disabilities in Prison Population: Yorkshire and Humberside Research project.* Dyslexia Action. Retrieved 1st October 2015. http://www.alippe.eu/documents/HiddenDisabilities.pdf

Edwards, J. (1994). *The scars of dyslexia: Eight case studies in emotional reactions*. London: Cassell.

Elder, G. H. & Clipp, E. C. (1989) Combat experience and emotional health: impairment and resilience in later life. *Journal of Personality, 57*, 311-341

Elliott, J. & Grigorenko, E.L. (2014). *The Dyslexia Debate.* Cambridge Univesity Press.

Fink, R. P. (2002). Successful Careers: The Secrets of Adults with Dyslexia, *Career Planning and Adult Development Network* Retrieved 2nd October 2015. http://insightpsychological.com/Library/Successful%20Careers%20Dyslexia.doc

Fink, R.P. (2015). *Successful Careers: The Secrets of Adults with Dyslexia. University of Michigan* .Retrieved 10th February 2015. http://dyslexiahelp.umich.edu/sites/default/files/SuccessfulCareersDyslexiaFink.pdf

Fitzgibbon, G & O'Connor, B (2002). *Adult dyslexia - a guide for the workplace*. Chichester, Wiley.

Folkman, S. & Moskowitz, T. J. (2000). The context matters. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 26*, 150-151.

Foss, B. (2015). *The Road to Success.* Retrieved 10th February 2015. http://www.smartkidswithld.org/community/success-profiles/ben-foss-changing-the-conversation-about-dyslexia/

Frazier, P., Conlon, A., & Glaser, T. (2001). Positive and negative life changes following sexual assault. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, Vol. 69,* No. 6, pp. (1048– 1055), 0022-006X.

Garmezy, N. (1985). Stress-resistant children: The search for protective factors. In A. Davids (Ed.), *Recent research in developmental psychopathology* (pp. 213–233). Elmsford, NY: Pergamon Press.

Gunty, A., Frazier, P.A., Tennen, H., Tomich, P., Tashiro, T., & Park, C. (2011). Moderators of the relation between perceived and actual posttraumatic growth. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy, Vol. 3,* No. 1, pp. (61-66), 1942-9861.

Henderson, C (2004). *Findings and Recommendations Arising from a Study into the Prevalence of Dyslexia* amongst Inmates at HMP Brixton. The Dyslexia Institute, unpublished.

Hewitt-Mann, J. (2012). *Dyslexia Behind Bars Final Report of a Pioneering Teaching and Mentoring Project at Chelmsford Prison – 4 years on.* Benfleet: Mentoring 4 U

Hogan, N., Morse, J. M., & Tason, M. C. (1996).

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

Toward an experiential theory of bereavement. *Omega, 33*, 45–65. I

Hulme, C., & Snowling, M.J. (2009). *Developmental disorders of language and cognition.* Oxford: Blackwell/Wiley.

Humphrey N (2003). Facilitating a Positive sense of self in pupils with Dyslexia: The role of Teachers and Peers, *Support for Learning, 18* (3) 130-136.

Humphrey, N.; and Mullins, P. (2002.) Personal constructs and attribution for academic success and failure in dyslexics. *British Journal of Special Education. 29*(4), 196-203

Inskeep, S. (2007). *Does Dyslexia Translate to Business Success?* December 26, 2007. Retrieved 10th February 2015. http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=17611066

Joseph, S., & Linley, P. A. (2008). Psychological assessment of growth following adversity: A review. In S. Joseph & P. A. Linley (Eds.*), Trauma, recovery, and growth: Positive psychological perspectives on posttraumatic stress* (pp. 22-36). New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.

Joseph, S., & Linley, P.A. (2005). Positive adjustment to threatening events: An organismic valuing theory of growth through adversity. *Review of General Psychology, Vol. 9,* No. 3, pp. (262-280), 1089-2680.

Joseph, S., Maltby, J. Wood, A.M. et al. (2012). Psychological Well-Being – Post-Traumatic Changes Questionnaire (PWB –PTCQ): Reliability and validity. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice and Policy, 4*(4), 420 –428

Keesee, N. J., Currier, J. M., & Neimeyer, R. A. (2008). Predictors of grief following the death of one's child: The contribution of finding meaning. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 64,* 1145– 1163.

Kobasa, S.C., Maddi, S.R., Puccetti, M.C., & Zola, M.A. (1985). Effectiveness of hardiness, exercise and social support as resources against illness. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research, 29,* 525-533.

Kopf, B. (2013). *From Dyslexia to CEO: How my learning disabilities taught me to be a successful entrepreneur.* TNW. Retrieved 10th February 2015. http://thenextweb.com/entrepreneur/2013/11/13/overcoming-disability-find-inspiration-startup/

Krakovsky, M. (2014). *What is missing when we study success?* Insights by Stanford Business. Retrieved 1st October 2015. https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/insights/what-were-missing-when-we-study-success

Laerum, E., Johnsen, N., Smith, P., & Larsen, S. (1987). Can myocardial infarction induce positive changes in family relationships? *Family Practice, 4*, 302-305

Lerner, D.J., Levine, S., Malspeis, S., D'Agostino, R.B., 1994. Job strain and health-related quality of life in a national sample. *American Journal of Public Health, 84*, 1580±1585.

Levine, S., Feldman, J.J., Elinson, J., 1983. Does medical care do any good? In: Mechanic, D. (Ed.), *Handbook of Health, Health Care and the Health Professions*. The Free Press, New York, pp. 394±404.

Linley, P. A., & Joseph, S. (2004). Positive change following trauma and adversity: A review. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, Vol. 17*, No. 1, pp. (11–21), 0894-9867.

Logan, J. (2009). *Dyslexic Entrepreneurs: The Incidence; Their Coping Strategies and Their Business* Skills. Cass Business School, Bunhill Row, London, UK. Dyslexia. DOI: 10.1002/dys.388

Logan, J. (2010). *Unusual Talent: a Study of Successful Leadership and Delegation in Dyslexic Entrepreneurs.* Cass Business School, City University London August 2010. Retrieved 10th February 2015. http://www.cassknowledge.com/sites/default/files/article-attachments/Dyslexic%20Entrepreneurs%20and%20Business%20Leaders%20Delegation%

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

2 0 a n d % 2 0 L e a d e r s h i p % 20skills_v9_18Nov10.pdf

Lundberg, O., 1997. Childhood conditions, sense of coherence, social class and adult ill health: Exploring their theoretical and empirical relations. *Social Science and Medicine, 44,* 821±831.

Lys, K., Pernice, R., 1995. Perceptions of positive attitudes toward people with spinal cord injury. *International Journal of Rehabilitation Research 18*, 35±43.

McFarland, C., & Alvaro, C. (2000). The impact of motivation on temporal comparisons: Coping with traumatic events by perceiving personal growth. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Vol. 79,* No. 3, pp. (327-343).

Nicolson, R.I (2015). *Positive dyslexi*a, Rodin books, Sheffield.

Nietzsche, F. (1888). *Twilight of the Idols*/ Götzen-Dämmerung. Maxims and Arrows, 8.

Oxford Dictionaries (2013). *Definition of Success.* Retrieved 12th December 2 0 1 3 . h t t p : / / www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/success

Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2003). Character strengths before and after September 11. *Psychological Science, 14,* 381-384.

Rutter, M. (1987). Psychosocial resilience and protective mechanisms. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 57,* 316 – 331. d o i : 1 0 . 1 1 1 1 / j . 1 9 3 9 - 0025.1987.tb03541.x

Scheier, M. F., & Carver, C. S. (1985). Optimism, Coping, and Health: Assessment and Implications of Generalized Outcome Expectancies. *Health Psychology,* 4(3), 219–247.

Scheier, M. F., Weintraub, J. K., & Carver, C. S. (1986). Coping with stress: Divergent strategies of optimists and pessimists. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 51*, 1257–1264.

Schoulte, J., Sussman, Z., Deb, M., Cornick, C., & Altmaier, E. M. (2012). Is there growth in grief: Measuring posttraumatic growth in the grief response. Open *Journal of Medical Psychology, 1*, 38-43.

Scott, R. (2004). *Dyslexia and Counselling*. Whurr, London.

Seligman, M.E.P. (2011). Flourish. New York: Free Press.

Sewards, L. (2014). *Dyslexia drove me to success*, 8th March 2014. Mail online. Retrieved 10th February 2015. http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2289758/James-Martin-says-dyslexia-drove-success-How-TV-chef-built-5m-fortune-despite-unable-read.html

Smith, J.A. (2004). Reflecting on the development of Interpretative phenomenological analysis and its contribution to qualitative research in psychology, *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 1*: 39-54.

Snowling, M.J. (2000). *Dyslexia.* 2nd edition. Oxford: Blackwell

Stiker, H.J. (1999) *A history of disability,* Michigan: Anne Arbor, University of Michigan Press.

Tedeschi, R.G., & Calhoun, L.G. (1996). The posttraumatic growth inventory: Measuring the positive legacy of trauma. Journal *of Traumatic Stress, Vol. 9,* No. 3, pp. (455-471), 089-9867.

Tedeschi, R. G., & Calhoun, L. G. (2004). Posttraumatic growth: Conceptual foundations and empirical evidence. *Psychological Inquiry, Vol. 15*, No. 1, pp. (1–18), 1047-840X.

Thomson, M. (1996). *Developmental dyslexia: Studies in disorders of communication.* London: Whurr.

Tickle, L. (2015). *Dyslexic entrepreneurs – why they have a competitive edge*. The Guardian. Thursday 15 January 2015 . Retrieved 10th February 2015. http://www.theguardian.com/small-business-network/2015/jan/15/dyslexic-entrepreneurs-competitive-edge-business-leaders

Weiss, T. & Berger, R. (Eds.) (2010).

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore

Posttraumatic growth and culturally competent practice: Lessons learned from around the globe. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

West, T. (2004). *Secret of the Super Successful...They're Dyslexic. Thalamus Journal, International Academy for Research in Learning Disabilities (IARLD)* February 2004. Retrieved 10th February 2015. http://eyetoeyenational.org/news/successful-dyslexics.html

Wright, B. (1988). Attitudes and the fundamental negative bias: Conditions and corrections. In: Yuker, H.E. (Ed.), *Attitudes Toward Persons With Disabilities.* Springer, New York, pp. 3±21.

Yalom, I. D., & Lieberman, M. A. (1991). Bereavement and heightened existential awareness. Psychiatry: *Journal for the Study of Interpersonal Processes, 54*, 334–345.

Znoj, H. J., & Keller, D. (2002). Mourning parents: Considering safeguards and their relation to health. *Death Studies, 26*(7), 545–565.

Zoellner, T., & Maercker, A. (2006). Posttraumatic growth in clinical psychology: A critical review and introduction of a two component model. *Clinical Psychology Review, Vol. 26*, No. 5, pp. (626–653), 0272-7358.

© 2016 Dyslexia Association of Singapore