Review written by Gail Van Schalkwyk, 2/05/20

**Review of the British Dyslexia Association’s FREE Webinar for Parents: Broadcast 30th April 2020**

**Creating without language by Qona Rankin, Dyslexic Co-ordinator, Royal College of Art**

<https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/events/free-webinar-for-parents-creating-without-language-why-the-arts-are-so-important-to-our-dyslexic-community>

*“Through nurturing creativity the intention is that self -confidence and aspirations to succeed will be improved.”*

This informative and uplifting webinar promotes the notion that dyslexic and dyspraxic brains have the potential to be exceptionally creative. It show cases the work of successful contemporary artists and creators who themselves have diagnosed dyslexia or dyspraxia (development co-ordination disorder). Finally, it offers ideas and support for finding ways of engaging our children in creative activities outside of the rigidity of the school curriculum.

Qona encourages parents, carers and educators to take the opportunity presented by the current lockdown, to pursue creative endeavours with our children and seek ways of helping them to engage in their own visual worlds. This is a place where “words wither away”, diversity of thought can take place and confidence can grow. It is a place where unplanned and incidental associations can lead to innate creativity. The *process* itself becomes important, offering us an alternative measure of success, one that is in my opinion, sadly neglected and at best under-valued, in the current restrictive, outcome-driven, exam orientated educational climate of most English schools.

The neuro-scientific understanding of how a dyslexic brain works is outlined clearly for the audience. Qona illustrates this using a film depicting two cyclists embarking on a journey. She emphasizes the wonderful creative outcomes that can occur, simply because two brains process information differently. A cyclist with dyslexia may not take the most direct or obvious route and can take longer to find the final destination, but their journey is enriched with a plethora of visual memories or experiences that the rest of us may quite simply miss.

Qona inspires us by showcasing the creative work of some of RCA’s alumni who have successful artistic careers and happen to have dyslexia and / or dyspraxia. I encourage you to take a look at the film describing the fashion designer Julian Roberts’ subtraction pattern cutting technique; a process he has created to overcome his directionality confusion. Also Bethan Mitchell’s witty and functional design work – a whale coat-hanger, quite extraordinary.

There follows a video with lots of suggestions for low or no cost artistic activities that are family friendly and engaging, paper explosions and sculpting with salt dough will soon be featuring in this lockdown home!

Qona offers great suggestions for further reading on the subject and the webinar features a Question and Answer session that parents of dyslexic children may find helpful.

This is a great webinar for parents and primary and secondary teachers alike. Highly informative, it offers some insight into the brains of dyslexic and some dyspraxic learners and their creative thinking potential. The work show-cased might also serve as a starting point for discussions about careers in the creative industry and help inspire a new generation of neuro-diverse learners as they emerge into our altering world with its post-Covid opportunities.

**Qona’s recommended books:**

*The Dyslexic Advantage: Unlocking the Hidden Potential of the Dyslexic Brain,* by Brock L. and Fernette F. Eide. London: Hay House, 2011 (an audio edition is available)

*Positive Dyslexia*, by Roderick Nicolson. Sheffield: Rodin Books, 2015

*Dyslexia is my Superpower (Most of the Time),* by Margaret Rooke. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2017

*The Illustrated Guide to Dyslexia and Its Amazing* by Kate Power and Kathy Iwanczak Forsyth. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2017

**Recommended websites:**

The British Dyslexia Association’s website is full of helpful information and resources. You can also access this and other high quality webinars free of charge via their website. Support and encouragement is at hand. The BDA is a charity and is working hard to reach out during the Covid-19 crisis.

<https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/>

<https://www.creativementors.org/news-creativity-at-home/>

<https://www.instagram.com/isolationartschool/>

**Links to some of the artists featured**:

<https://katemccgwire.com/> (Sculptor)

<https://bethanmitchell.com/> (Designer)

<https://www.rca.ac.uk/more/staff/julian-roberts/> (Fashion designer and pattern cutting)

<https://henryfranks.net/> (Product designer)

<https://www.rca.ac.uk/students/mirry-stolzenberg/> (Illustrator)

**About the author:**

**Gail Van Schalkwyk** is a freelance specialist SEN Maths teacher and practising artist, based in Northumberland. She graduated from Newcastle upon Tyne University with a degree in Fine Art. An experienced primary school teacher, Gail was a first school headteacher before becoming a federation SENCO working with children (3-18years) and their families. She recently completed her PG Cert in Dyscalculia and Maths Learning Difficulties at Manchester Metropolitan University and is an accredited British Dyslexia Association dyscalculia teacher.

*“I have a passion to see those with maths learning difficulties succeed and enjoy effective, creative and relevant maths education.”*

**SEND Maths Services by Gail** aims to support children and young people who are struggling with Maths, as well as their parents / carers and the educational professionals who work with them.

Gail can be contacted via email: gail@vshub.net

Did you know that Maths learning difficulties affect 6% of our children and young people?