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Growing up with dyslexia

I went to school in the 80s and 90s when dyslexia was viewed as a disability. I was taken out of my regular class and put into Special Needs classes with all the other children that didn't fit the mould. On reflection it all felt very odd but as a child I accepted it. Those in the 'special class' had behavioural problems or 'issues' at home – we were labelled as 'unable to educate' or indeed misfits.

After spending 4 years in this class I realised that the education system was failing us. Very often the so-called weakest students were actually the brightest, we just didn't fit the dated education system - literacy shouldn't be a benchmark for intelligence. Those in the class were just outliers and didn't fit into the dated mindset that was instilled into teachers in the 1990s.

I sailed through art, maths, physics and design & technology, yet struggled with English, French and history. This pattern is a sign that someone is neurodiverse and has a spiky IQ profile. I soon grew to enjoy English and other language-based subjects when I had the right environment and mentors. I found it was okay to not chase that A in English and I was content with getting a B or even a C+. I realised it was as big an achievement as getting an A* in maths.

With time I improved my reading by engaging in creative writing activities around design and engineering work. I am happy to say that over the years, I have been able to publish many of my written pieces internationally. It's also recently that I've realised how those outdated teaching methods affected my learning and, sadly, my confidence. My mind has always gravitated toward creative, problem solving and team-based activities. I like my space but feel at ease with those who have a unique trait in their thinking.

Path to engineering

I realised in secondary school that my natural ability lay in complex maths and art – it was like magic to me – a language I understood deeply. In 1994 I saw the film Big where Tom Hanks became a toy engineer and I realised that was what I wanted to do.

My father is a physicist, so he spotted my interest in science and maths. He would take me to engineering and maths events during the weekends – I loved it. In 1997 I enrolled in an Engineering Degree at Glasgow University which has the oldest engineering school in the UK. It's also where great scientists and engineers like Lord Kevin, Albert Einstein, Sir James Watts and many others worked and studied.

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Engineering just felt logical and natural to me but double maths every morning was fabulous! I went on to do a master's and then MBA, and soon realised that being dyslexic wasn't holding me back at all. If anything, it was propelling me towards a technical, creative and strategic career.

Mamta Singhal BEng MSc MBA CEng MIET *is a design engineer and a campaigner for diversity in engineering. In 2007, she was awarded the Women's Engineering Society Prize for engaging and inspiring young people's interest in STEM. Mamta's expertise has led her to work for major corporations like Dyson, Hasbro and Mattel.*

In this blog series Mamta explores dyslexia and how it's affected her life and career.