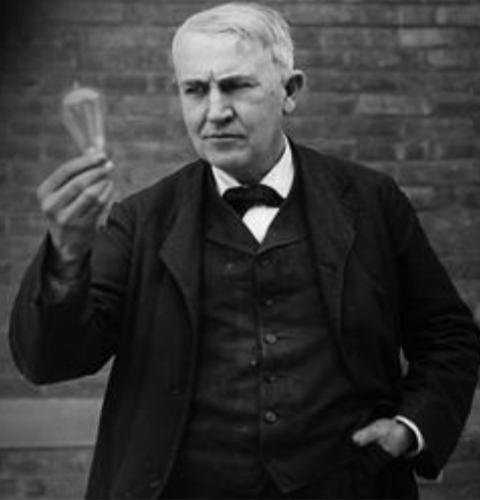
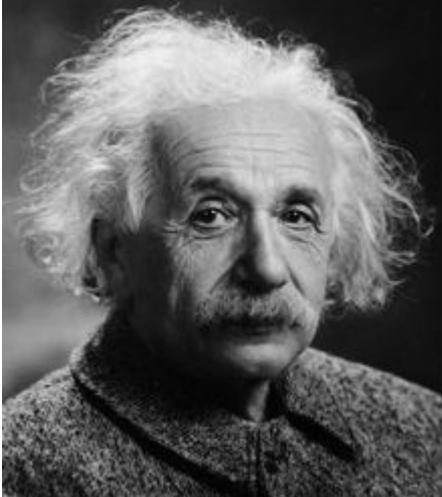


CoNNections

When Thomas Edison was six years old, his teacher sent a note home saying: "He is too stupid to learn."



Albert Einstein's teachers said that he was mentally slow, unsociable and adrift in his foolish dreams.



Yet where would the world be without the genius of these two men?

*Development proposal for Connections (alternatively called Re'Cognition), a reality TV series.
Prepared by David Large and Ailsa Tulloch, ATTV, March 2015.
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Executive Summary

Take a group of dyslexic teenagers. Put them through a series of carefully structured learning experiences and problem solving challenges, from organizing a concert to a military style boot-camp. Then at the end, see what impact this has had on their lives and if they have overcome the perceived limitations of dyslexia. This is 'Connections', a thirteen part, 24-minute reality TV series that, for the first time, recognizes and works with dyslexia, treating it as a gift rather than a disability. At the same time, *Connections* will address misperceptions about dyslexia and other learning disabilities.

Background

Dyslexia – a general term for disorders that involve difficulty in learning to read or interpret words, letters and other symbols, but that do not affect general intelligence.

Given that around forty percent of successful self made entrepreneurs have some kind of attention deficit disorder (including dyslexia), it is clear that dyslexia is not simply a disability. However, the flip-side of this coin is those who fall through the cracks and whose potential is lost to the world. It is estimated that over fifty percent of prison inmates and around eighty percent of those in drug-rehab centers are dyslexic or have some form of attention deficit disorder.

Through *Connections*, we will show that if Dyslexia is recognized early, and with the right methodology and the right learning, these people can adapt and overcome it without their potential being lost.

Connections will also be an opportunity to tackle the stigma associated with dyslexia and show that people who have this condition are not less intelligent or less capable – they just have a different way of seeing and understanding the world. *Connections* will ultimately be a story of hope and inspiration – not only affecting the lives of six participants, but of viewers who themselves have been affected either as parents or as sufferers of various learning disabilities.

What is Connections

Where conventional reality shows call for contestants to 'outwit and outsmart' each other, sometimes with destructive consequences, for a huge prize, in *Connections* there will be no self-esteem destroying eliminations, no million rand first prize and no threatening competitive behavior. Yet, we will still place our participants in unexpected and unpredictable situations.

The backbone of the series will be the application of specific learning strategies aimed and dealing with dyslexia. But, to give this learning a real-life application and to add the entertainment value that makes good television, participants will take on a series of challenges. These will be interesting and entertaining, while being designed around educational objectives. We will see how the participants are equipped to handle these challenges after being exposed to specific learning strategies at the start of each episode.

For an extended period (anything from three to six weeks) participants will live in an environment isolated from their normal lives. We will feel the pain and emotion as they come up against walls and fight their way past their own perceived limitations.

At the end of each episode the participants will face a panel of evaluators. But, instead of being there to judge, they are there to encourage, to advise, to ask the participants the right questions and uplift them.

As the series starts, we profile each participant before they undergo the intensive Davis™ Learning Strategies Dyslexia programme. We will find out why they are regarded as dyslexic. We will take a look at their school performance and their extra-mural activities and find out what their struggles are. We will speak to their teachers, their friends and their family to gain extra insight. During the course of the series we will track their progress as they go through various challenges. The series will end with a look at how their lives through this experience and what impact the Davis Learning Strategies Davis™ Dyslexia Programme have had on their lives. Thus we will complete the story of transformation.

What Makes Connections Different

Connections will focus on positive re-enforcement rather than competition. It will have a real-world educational approach, featuring teenagers who are dealing with real personal issues and learning disabilities challenges. It will include challenges that focus on remedial education while still having entertainment value.

There will be a variety of challenges, testing a wide range of skills, so that each participant canis likely to win excel at some things and find their own niche. It will deal with a real issue that has a debilitating effect on many people.

Challenges

The participants will face a series of challenges designed to test their abilities, build their confidence and put them onto a new path of self-discovery. And, of course, provide the entertainment and fun factor.

These challenges will be designed by Axel Gudmunsson (in order to keep them in line with

the relevant Davis Learning Strategies Davis™ Dyslexia Programme) and a team of educational experts, based on skills that would normally be challenging to dyslexics, such as reading comprehension, spelling, co-ordination and mathematical ability. One of the key elements that will be brought through in these challenges is the ability to focus.

The challenges will be structured in a way that the emphasis is not as much on competing against others (although there will be healthy competition), but for the participants to compete against themselves. (Thus we refer to them as participants and not as competitors).



For the purpose of conceptualization, we suggest the following challenges and activities (in no particular order):

1. **Organising an event:** Obviously this would test their ability to think ahead, to plan, delegate, work with budgets, meet deadlines and take on serious organizational skills.
2. **Producing a short play or a short film:** This will be aimed at expressing the experience of dyslexia and will be presented to a real, (and critical audience) at an actual theatre.

3. **A boot camp:** In this challenge the participants will go through a physically demanding obstacle course, which will not only demand physical skills, but will see participants working as teams to take on problem solving and puzzle style challenges. Either include sports in this section, or have a separate section on sports, because a lot of dyslexics excel at sports.



4. **Producing a photographic exhibition:** Given that most dyslexics are visual thinkers, this would be a chance for them to explore and express the world around them through pictures and thus discover a whole new language – the language of lenses and exposure.



5. **A treasure hunt.** Participants will be sent a citywide excursion in search of special artifacts, to reach certain destinations and find specific people – all within a limited time. This treasure hunt will involve skills such as map reading, strategic planning, problem solving and so on.
6. **Profiling a successful dyslexic.** Each participant will spend a day with a successful dyslexic (a businessperson, sports personality or entertainment celebrity). With the help of a TV Crew, they will interview them and compile a short video report. They will then report back on how this particular person has managed to live with dyslexia and succeed. We suggest inviting these people as special guests to take part in the evaluation panel in this episode, and create a mechanism to establish a mentoring relationship between them and the participants. This challenge will also help to de-stigmatize dyslexia.

7. **Preparing a meal for a group of VIP guests.** Here, under pressure, the participants will use a combination of planning skills, technical knowledge (under the guidance of a guest chef) and creativity to prepare a gourmet meal for a group of VIP guests. (And, one of the greatest celebrity chefs of our time, Jamie Oliver, is himself a dyslexic.)



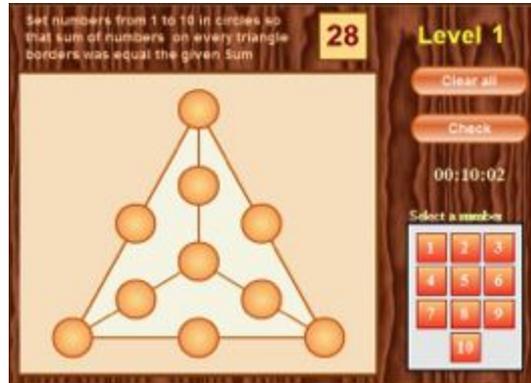
8. **Puzzles, word games and problem solving.** These kinds of activities will be worked into all challenges.

This blend of challenges will form the thread that runs through thirteen episodes. Several of these challenges will involve learning new skills that fall outside of the scope of the **Davis Learning-
TM**

StrategyDavis Dyslexia Programme. In

this case, we suggest using subject specialists, such as photographers and theatre producers, to coach the participants. These subject experts (or coaches) will form part of the panel at the end of each episode.

They would ideally be dyslexic or ADHD themselves.



Winners & prizes

Viewers love to see competitions and love to see winners. While caution should be taken not to let competition become destructive, a healthy element of competition should be worked into Connections.

1. Winning a challenge

We suggest that each challenge or each episode has a particular winner, with smaller prizes (sponsored) that are geared towards encouraging and developing skills. If the range of challenges are designed to test a wide enough range of skills, and if we have the right mix of participants, each participant will stand a chance of winning at least once – again emphasizing that while you may ‘suck’ at certain things, it’s OK because you’re probably really good at other things.

2. Overall winners

During the finale (episode 13) we will award overall prizes and we suggest considering the following:

1. The most improved participant based on school results

Initial suggestions were that the most improved participant receives a scholarship. This could be based on actual school performance and a combination of other factors. (See notes below on ‘Linking Connections to school performance’)

2. The class choice for the most improved participant

The participants themselves can weigh in by voting for a winner, or the participants in combination with a panel of evaluators can vote for the person who they feel has grown the most through this experience.

3. Everyone can win at something

In the end, in giving overall recognition, each participant should be acknowledged for something – encouraging them to understand their own strengths and live according to these.

Linking Connections to school performance

One of the initial briefing documents referred to students preparing for their A-Levels (and in South African this would be matric.) We could thus take a group of learners at the start of their matric year and use their grade 11 marks as a starting point. The series will be structured in a way that the final episode is shot several months after they have returned to their normal lives and after they have written their matric trial exams. These results would then be used as a benchmark to show how their overall school performance has improved. We could use individuals who have already failed at Matric, and are having their “last shot” at succeeding in Matric.

TM

Incorporating the Davis Learning Strategies Davis Dyslexia Programme

One of the aims of Connections is to show how the Davis Learning Strategies Davis Dyslexia Programme (or other specific interventions) can change lives. However, we have to keep the entertainment value of the project in mind. Since footage of a group of learners in a classroom setting, or undergoing one on one sessions, will not have much entertainment value, the bulk of the actual learning will happen off screen. The viewers will only see simplified scenes of the facilitator working with individuals on specific learning strategies, which lead to specific challenges that they will face. The content of this will be explained through a combination of voice over mixed with comments from the facilitator (Axel) and one or two of the participants.

For example:

“I’ve always struggled spelling – and it’s used to make me feel like everyone else was better than me. So, what we learned today was important because I think that if I can spell better, I’ll be able to write better and express myself better. And, I also discovered that I really like writing.”

At the end of each episode, with the help of the panel, we will revisit what was learned and how it was applied. Indeed.

Creating The Elements

The setting – a captive group

This project will be most effective if the participants are taken away from their normal environment to live, learn, and work in an isolated setting for a period of time. They would be housed in a boot-camp style living environment, which will in itself be part of the testing and learning experience. They will all be given household tasks and will be given the challenge of being responsible not only for their own well-being, but for the well being of those around them. This will be an ideal opportunity for them to demonstrate self management and to understand that each of their actions has consequences, not only for themselves but for others. Some of the participants will be ADD or ADHD, and therefore really struggle with certain “life skills concepts”. These include consequence, time, sequence, and order vs. disorder. The DavisTM programme will deal with these concepts, and the show can illustrate how that improves their ability to work in a group and meet deadlines.

Several locations can be considered, depending on costing, the kinds of facilities available, proximity to major centres and logistical factors.

At this stage the Chrysalis Academy in Tokai (Cape Town) has been suggested as a location. This campus used to be a correctional facility, but has been transformed into a training academy for creating young entrepreneurs. This is la lovely metaphor for the individual transformation of the participants, as well as for the underprivileged in SA.

This will provide a combination of learning facilities and a location in which certain challenges could be undertaken. - Setting Connections in the Cape Town area could also be attractive for potential sponsors and broadcasters.

Selection of 'The Class'

The cast of Connections will be six teenagers who, as a result of dyslexia or similar conditions, are struggling through life and seem destined to not achieving their potential. In casting the show, proper psychometric testing would be done to ensure the correct profiles. We will also look at variety and extremes– from a downright rebel to a complete underachiever or a misguided genius. These will be people who would otherwise fall through the cracks of the education system because of their struggle to adapt to conventional education methods.

Having six participants will also allow us the option of breaking the group into teams of two or three. This group will collectively be called 'The Class'.

The presenters

In a TV Show of this nature, the personality of the host is a key factor that holds everything together and keeps the viewers watching. Just think of the adventure camp style of Jeff Probst (*Survivor*), or the way in which Phil Keoghan tells the last participants that they have been eliminated from *The Amazing Race*. As hosts, they facilitate and sometimes stir up the action, yet they always lead the audience through the story, summing up and moving the action forward. A lot of TV hosts are likely to have traits of ADHD – thriving on action, drama, problem-solving, and tight deadlines.

In Connections, we see our presenters as a combination of a subject expert, a facilitator/trainer and an entertainer. Firstly we see Axel Gudmundsson himself playing the role of facilitator – bringing his own combination of passion and personal understanding into the experience. We suggest partnering him with a trained presenter who will play the role of the host. Together, they should create a dynamic on-camera team who will not only put the participants through their paces, but will skillfully lead the viewer through the process.

Evaluation Panel

The evaluation panel will be loosely modeled along the lines of reality TV shows such as *X-Factor* and *The Voice*. Yet they will be more like coaches than judges and their role will be to enhance the learning experience. At the end of each episode, the participants as a group will stand in front of the panel who will question them about their experience and allow them to evaluate themselves.

In the case of Connections, the panel will be made up of Axel, the Host and one or two subject experts (coaches) who have helped the participants through the challenges on that particular episode. It is also preferable that this panel consists of successful and

prominent people who are themselves dyslexics and as such are potential role models. Including famous people on this panel will also contribute to the entertainment value of this project.

Diary Cam Techniques

A successful technique used in reality TV is the 'diary cam', sometimes called the confessional. Participants are taken aside from the rest of the action and given a chance to privately relate their own experience, their own feelings and their own opinions. These private moments will be carefully facilitated and selected in order to give the viewers first hand insight into what that particular participant is going through. At relevant times throughout each episode, we will dip into the diary cam to relate and give context to what has been happening during the show.

Celebrity Endorsements

Another device that we visualize including in Connections is endorsements from celebrities (or successful personalities) in which they not only open up about their own dyslexia, but give a message of support to the participants and viewers.

1. Special guests

We will invite celebrities to appear as special guests at certain points in the show. They will be asked to share some of their own life experience and to give encouragement and motivation. For example, a big bonus would be to feature Jamie Oliver as a guest when the participants prepare a VIP meal.

2. Celebrity endorsements

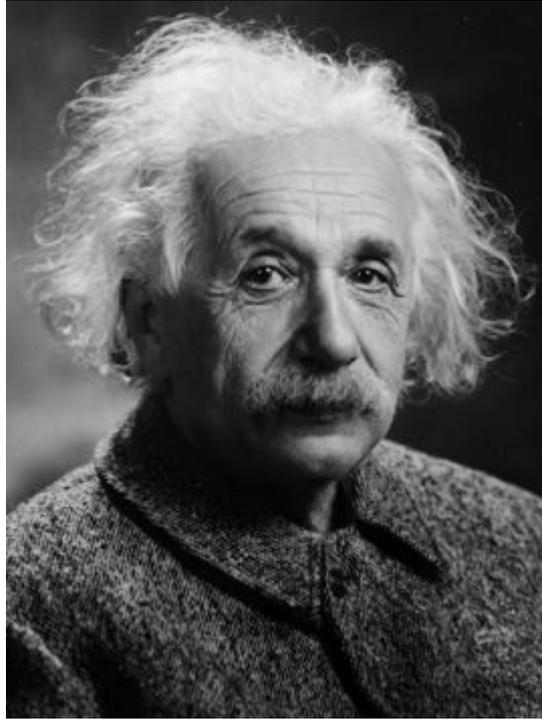
To compliment the above idea, we will pre-package short clips (20 seconds) in which celebrities, or other successful dyslexics, briefly endorse the show and give messages of encouragement. We could include these clips at the start of the show or after ad-breaks, in the place of conventional programme stings.

3. Information snippets

These would be used in the same way as celebrity endorsements, but will be short information snippets about famous people and historical figures. For example, the script would read:

"His teachers said that he was mentally slow, unsociable and adrift in his foolish dreams. Yet he grew up to be one of the greatest scientific minds of our time. Who is he – stay tuned to find out."

In a follow up snippet we find out that it is in fact Albert Einstein.



Key discussion points for development

Further development of this project will be based on a synthesis of ideas and principles, combining creative elements with technical and educational outcomes. We believe that the following elements should be part of the agenda for further development:

1. We have based this proposal on a simple understanding of dyslexia and of remedial teaching strategies. As we refine this understanding the various challenges and activities will also be refined and adapted so that they meet the objectives of both a good TV Programme and a good learning strategy.
2. We need to identify prominent South Africans who are dyslexic.
3. We need to fine-tune how the casting and selection of appropriate candidates will be done.
4. The ideal age of the participants needs to be defined. The reference literature speaks about ages 5 – 8 and ages 8 upwards. However, a more mature group of participants may make for more dynamic TV Content. Our document refers to a matric age, but this could be adapted. (A follow up project could also deal with dyslexic adults). I have been approached by an adult dyslexic, who has failed Matric at least eight times – and still aims to give it another go.
5. The selection of the panel, as either subject experts (in terms of specific challenges) or successful dyslexics or a combination of both.
6. To what extent and how TM Davis Learning Strategies Davis Dyslexia Programme will be incorporated into the programme. And, how would we incorporate and edit 30 hours of one-on-one sessions into the programme structure.

7. Selection of presenter/host and facilitator.
8. The appropriateness of isolating the participants for the duration of the series and the duration of this isolation. -This could be for an extended period or for blocks of say 5 days at a time.
9. Identification of well-known personalities who could contribute to and endorse the project.
10. Selection of locations and other logistical issues.
11. Sponsorship opportunities (headline sponsorship as well as part sponsorships).
12. We need to work competition and prize winning into the show in a healthy, constructive way.