

**Music essay:**

**Music and Dyslexia**

By

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## **Introduction**

Impossible should not be the word when it comes to dyslexia and music. Although people with dyslexia may have significant difficulties in auditory skills, motor skills, spatial skills, visual perception, timing skill, short-term memory, phonological processing, co-ordination, concentration, organisation sequencing and working at speed, (Macmillian, n.d., para. 6) which resulted in them to face certain difficulties when they are learning music, we still see some famous dyslexics musicians like Nigel Kennedy today.

Hence, this does not mean that dyslexics would never get a chance to learn music. In fact, this can actually be resolved with suitable teaching methods used to help those dyslexics in music making and building their confidence in the process.

## **Multisensory teaching approach**

Studies from the National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development (n.d.) have proven that for children with [dyslexia], learning [through] a multi-sensory teaching method is the most effective approach or treatment (para. 1). Due to the fact that dyslexic children process information differently for others, they are unable to keep up with traditional teaching methods. Hence it is important to incorporate all of the senses to give them the opportunity to learn like the involving all of their senses: visual, auditory, tactile, and kinaesthetic.

Herold, J's. (2003) study has shown that using a multi-sensory approach to teach would not only alleviate anxiety which occurs frequently among dyslexics, but also help their brains absorb the information being conveyed to them. For example, Macmillian (n.d.) had found out that since dyslexics face difficulties reading notes when they were learning music (para. 6), they learn much more easily after listening to recordings of the music pieces or by watching their teacher demonstrate the sounds and techniques required. Some of the effective multisensory approach found by Skeath (2010) to aid the dyslexic musician include drama to help with those Italian words, and even the using of salt tray or plastic letters to revise symbols (para. 21). Since dyslexics may face problem remembering all this Italian words and symbols.

One may argue that “the learning style or strategies varies across individuals and is linked to personality differences” (Mortimore, 2003, p.6). However, brain scan experiments have shown that dyslexic people use different areas of the brain to process information. Sam (2005) found out that dyslexics have a deficiency in their left hemisphere; hence their left and right hemispheres have difficulty working together. They need to feel, touch, move, hear, and have a teacher who uses concepts (something they can visualize in their minds, proven to be a strong trait in dyslexics) to help them. Therefore, they have difficulty remembering details which most "ordinary" people seem to have no difficulty with (para 1). Hence it can be concluded that dyslexics would respond better towards multisensory teaching approach as they are right-brain dominant, thus a multisensory teaching method may aid them better when they are learning music.

### **Building of confidence / determination**

The multisensory teaching approach is beneficial to dyslexics. When they found out that they actually manage to cope with their difficulties, dyslexics' level of anxiety may be

alleviated and the negative feelings tend to be transformed into more positive ones. A psychologist from Dyslexia Association of Singapore, Yau Shu Hui, has also found out that when a positive attitude is established, dyslexics tends to have more confidence towards themselves and therefore would be more determined to learn music.<sup>1</sup>

According to S. Moody (n.d.):

Relief at being understood, determination to succeed, and confidence in having the strategies they need to cope with the difficulties. These calmer feelings help to ‘unfog’ the brain and so increase their efficiency (p.2- 3).

From this, we can conclude that if dyslexics manage to cope with the difficulties that they are facing, like the understanding of the musical symbols and words, all this small achievements that they had achieved would gradually combine together into a greater achievement. This will thus build up their confidence which is an essential element needed for successful performances in the future.

With confidence in themselves, dyslexics usually would be more motivated and determined to get to their goal. “Without determination, no matter how hard a person tries to obtain certain things in life...he will still not get it. And the only way to be successful in life is through determination” (Goh, 2007). From this it can be seen and it is known that determination is one of the most important aspects to succeed in life.

One may also argue that dyslexics usually have low self esteem and have no confidence in themselves. Hence, it is doubtful that they will succeed in the music industry, due to the multiple failures which pushed them into a hole from which they are trying to get out.<sup>2</sup> Therefore from the research done, it can be concluded that, teachers play very important

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<sup>1</sup> Yau Shu Hui, personal communication, 19 July 2010, Singapore

<sup>2</sup> Formal observation of dyslexics student, 20 July 2010, Singapore

authority figures in dyslexic's lives. The appropriate methods that they used (such as the multisensory approach) would aid the dyslexics in gaining confidence after experiencing multiple successes.

Nigel Kennedy, a violinist, was one of the famous dyslexic musicians. He said: “to deny a dyslexic person with proper educations is a waste of potential. If the correct training is being incorporated into the system, it will encourage individual to maximise their personal skills.” Hence, we see the importance of employing the appropriate teaching method in teaching dyslexics music, instead of giving them up.

## **Conclusion**

The study has shown that due to the nature of dyslexia, students with dyslexia do face difficulties when they are learning music. However, during the days whereby dyslexics were learning music, teachers play a very important part. By using the appropriate method to teach them like the use of multisensory teaching approach, they will gain confidence in themselves (when they start to experience success) as time goes by and become more motivated with themselves, thus being more determined to do well.

To sum up, dyslexia does not hinder a person from pursuing a career in the music industry. Once a correct teaching approach has been used to aid the student and subsequently build up their confidence, there is still a chance that they will still succeed in the music industry.

Word counts: 1039

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