



Making music accessible

Teaching students with Dyslexia

Compiled by Karen Marshall

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Dyslexia and other Specific Learning Difficulties:

Key features and common indications

Dr Kim Rochelle

Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs) is an umbrella term that includes a range of developmental conditions that frequently co-occur and this tends to be the rule rather than the exception. SpLDs are developmental, that is, they become apparent in childhood. They are of neurological origin, they are inheritable and impact upon the way individuals process and learn information.

SpLDs should not be confused with the term 'learning difficulties', which relates to a global learning difficulty and impaired intellectual ability. *Specific* learning difficulties are usually diagnosed when there is a discrepancy between the individual's actual level of attainment in specific skills and that expected for their age and ability. Thus, they appear independently of intelligence and are not caused by a lack of educational opportunities or inadequate teaching. SpLDs can have a significant effect upon learning day-to-day activities throughout life. Overlapping characteristics include difficulties in working memory, visual and auditory processing, time management, self-organisation, reading and numeracy skills (British Dyslexia Association [BDA], 2018).

Musicians with SpLDs may show signs of difficulties with:

- reading music (especially at sight)
- rhythm
- remembering aspects of theory (e.g. numbers of sharps or flats)
- aural work
- working out interval names
- recognising cadences
- sustaining concentration for an exam
- learning sequences and adapting to subsequent change
- motor coordination and action planning
- organising and inhibiting actions or movement.

Key features and common indications of the most frequently co-occurring SpLDs are described below.

Dyslexia

Developmental dyslexia affects approximately 10% of the population, 4% to a severe extent (Saunders, 2012). It becomes apparent when a child has unusual difficulty with mapping sounds and letters to build word-level reading and spelling skills [i.e. 'decoding' words for reading and 'encoding' words for spelling], in spite of adequate teaching (Jones & Kindersley, 2013). However, it is also characterised by a difference in thinking processes that can have a number of positive effects, such as creativity and 'thinking outside the box'.

Sir Jim Rose gave the following working definition of dyslexia in the Rose Review (2009, p.10) following consultation with a panel of expert dyslexia academics, the BDA, other dyslexia specialist organisations, educators and individuals who contributed to the call for evidence. "Dyslexia is 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

[i.e. identifying and manipulating sounds within words], verbal memory [i.e. short-term and working memory for spoken information] and verbal processing [i.e. recognising, retrieving from long term memory and articulating symbolic information at speed]. Dyslexia occurs across the range of intellectual abilities.



It is best seen as a continuum, not a distinct category and there are no clear cut off points [i.e. there are individual differences in presentation]. Co-occurring difficulties may be seen in aspects of language, motor co-ordination, mental calculation, concentration and personal organisation skills, but these are not, by themselves, markers of dyslexia." Rose also suggested that the severity of dyslexia is decided by the extent to which the individual responds to appropriate intervention. The BDA management board adopted Rose's working definition and added a paragraph, which should always appear with it. "The BDA acknowledges the visual processing

difficulties that some individuals with dyslexia can experience and points out that dyslexic readers can show a combination of abilities and difficulties that affect the learning process. Some also have strengths in other areas, such as design, problem solving, creative skills, interactive skills and oral skills" (Saunders, 2012). The enabling factors of dyslexia are evidenced by a large number of successful and celebrity entrepreneurs, sports personalities and performers.

Further information can be found at:
bdadyslexia.org.uk

Visual difficulties

Visual difficulties can co-occur with dyslexia but they are not by themselves indications of dyslexia. Some individuals experience visual disturbance when processing visual information. For example, they may report that letters, numbers and words appear to blur, move around and change order on the page. They can experience headaches and show signs of visual discomfort, such as watery eyes or eye rubbing. Such individuals may also report that their symptoms can be reduced to some extent by using tinted transparent overlays or having information printed on pastel coloured paper. The SpLD Assessment Standardisation Committee

(SASC) June 2018 guidelines state that individuals who show indications of visual difficulties or discomfort should be referred to a suitably qualified optometrist for a full examination of visual function. However, if an individual uses a tinted overlay or coloured paper as their normal way of working in study related activities, this should also be permitted for musical activities.

Further information can be found at:
bdadyslexia.org.uk

Dyspraxia/Developmental Coordination Disorder

Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD) is a significant difficulty in the development of gross and/or fine motor skills and coordination in children and adults. Dyspraxia is a specific type of DCD, which is also characterised by difficulties in planning, organising and executing movement. It may also affect articulation, speech and visual-spatial processing skills. Both can have a significant impact upon an individual's day to day activities. DCD is a lifelong condition, recognised by international organisations including the World Health Organisation. It is different from other motor disorders (e.g. cerebral palsy) and occurs across the range of intellectual abilities. There are individual differences in presentation and these may change over time.

Children may have difficulties in self-care, writing, typing, learning to ride a bike, catching a ball and other recreational/educational activities. Adults may continue to have these difficulties and may also have problems with DIY, driving a car, and learning new skills at home, in studying and the workplace (Dyspraxia Foundation, 2018). Children showing indications of motor-coordination difficulties should always be referred to a paediatrician to rule out any underlying medical conditions.

Further information can be found at:
www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk

Dyscalculia

Developmental dyscalculia is less well researched than other SpLDs. However, estimates suggest that it is likely to occur in 3-6% of the population. It is characterised by a presence of difficulties in mathematics, especially arithmetic, that is not caused by a lack of educational opportunities and a discrepancy between the individual's level of attainment in maths and their age. The National Numeracy Strategy (2001) describes dyscalculia as a condition that affects the ability to acquire arithmetic skills. Learners with dyscalculia may have difficulty understanding basic number concepts, intuitively grasping numbers and have problems with learning

number facts and procedures. They may use an appropriate method and produce a right answer but may do so mechanically and without confidence. Individuals with dyscalculia may have difficulties in understanding sets and number sense (i.e. knowing that 7 = seven), accurate and fluent calculation, as well as problems with mathematical reasoning (Butterworth and Yeo, 2004).

Further information can be found at:
bdadyslexia.org.uk

Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Attention deficit (hyperactivity) disorder is characterised by a persistent pattern (at least 6 months) of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity, which becomes apparent typically during early to mid-childhood. The degree of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity is unexpected for the child's age and level of intelligence; it can have a significant impact on educational, occupational, and social activities. Inattention is characterised by a significant difficulty in sustaining attention to tasks that do not provide a high level of stimulation or frequent rewards, distractibility and problems with self-organisation. Hyperactivity is characterised by excessive motor activity and difficulties with keeping still, most apparent in structured situations that require self-control. Impulsivity is characterised by

a tendency to act immediately in response to stimuli, without thought or consideration of risk or consequence. Individuals may show indications that are predominantly inattentive (ADD), predominantly hyperactive-impulsive or in combination (ADHD). The balance may change over time. In order for a medical diagnosis of ADD/ADHD, the behaviour pattern must be clearly observable in more than one setting (ICD-11, 2018). Individuals with ADD/ADHD frequently experience difficulties in working memory and information processing speed.

Further information can be found at *The National Attention Deficit Disorder Information and Support Service* at: www.addiss.co.uk

High-Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder or Asperger Syndrome

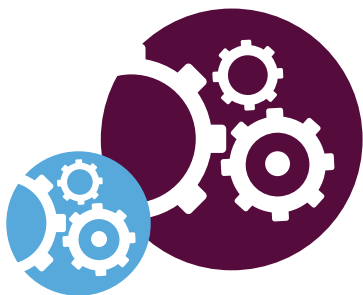
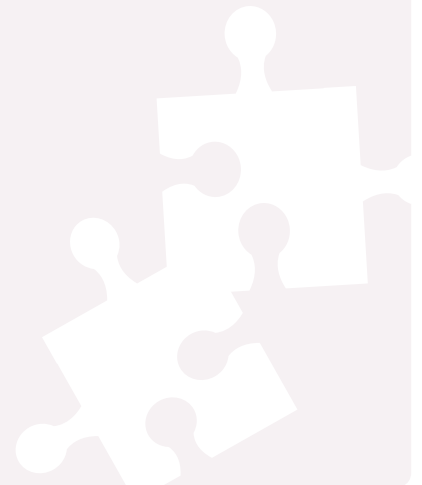
Autism is a lifelong developmental condition that affects how people perceive the world and interact with others. The characteristics of high functioning autism/Asperger Syndrome vary from person to person, but in order for a diagnosis to be made, an individual will usually be assessed as having had **persistent difficulties with social communication and social interaction** and **restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviours, activities or interests** since early childhood, to the extent that these **limit and impair everyday functioning** (National Autistic Society, 2018). A formal identification of autism usually follows assessment by a multi-disciplinary diagnostic team, often including a speech and language therapist, paediatrician, psychiatrist and/or clinical psychologist. People with high functioning autism are of average

or above average intelligence and they may have co-occurring SpLDs. They may have no problems with speech but they may have difficulties with understanding and processing language, as well as problems with understanding inter-personal cues, social norms and situations. They may also be particularly susceptible to stress and anxiety. However, some individuals also have significant strengths, such as perfect pitch and timing in music, excellent attention to detail and working/long term memory.

Further information can be found at:
www.autism.org.uk

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The accessible teaching tool kit

Karen Marshall

The following tools are the ones I have developed and used over many years for students with specific learning difficulties. Some of it is just accepted 'good teaching' practice (based on highly respected teaching approaches such as Kodály) but also there's lots of tips and approaches colleagues have generously shared with me over the years.

These tools can be used with any student (even those without difficulties). Remember all students are different, so do be aware when using this tool kit that no teaching tool can be 100% guaranteed to work for everyone. Teachers need to adapt, and be student-led with any approach.

Think critically - I have made the mistake in the past that if an approach was something I didn't personally relate to, I haven't always tried it. I now work with a totally open mind and will try anything with the end game of finding what works for the student.

Be flexible and instill a sense of belief in students - students really thrive if they believe that you will work with them until a successful learning strategy is found however long it takes.

Acknowledgment

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Tool kit 1 Systematic

A definition of systematic

1. Relating to or consisting of a system.
2. Presented or formulated as a coherent body of ideas or principles: systematic thought.
- 3a. Methodical in procedure or plan a systematic approach.
- 3b. Marked by thoroughness and regularity: systematic efforts.

(Merriam-Webster Dictionary. *Definition of 'systematic'*.)

Accessed www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/systematic 12.10.18).

Students with specific learning difficulties including dyslexia really benefit from systematic teaching. This can be due to working memory and short-term memory issues which can make recalling things very difficult. A useful image can be to think of putting information into a filing cabinet, ensuring that the information goes in the mind in the right order in the first place. This can be hugely beneficial when trying to retrieve that information. As a teacher, I have found that if there is ever a problem in understanding a concept, there is always some element of the learning process that hasn't been grasped. Sometimes a topic can need to be broken down into much smaller stages for it to be grasped.

The important thing is to:

1. Identify what stage the student is at, what part they understand and where they began to struggle.
2. How to break that teaching topic into enough steps so the student is then able to grasp the concept.

Here's some wise advice from the late 19th Century piano pedagogue, Mrs Curwen. These educational maxims advise systematic teaching over and over again:

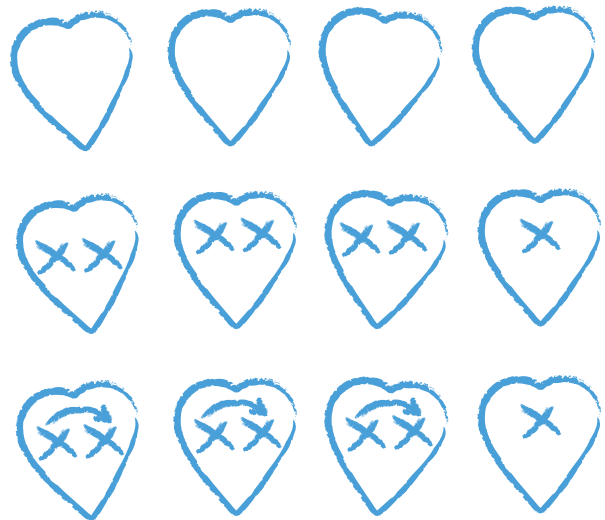
- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Teach the easy before the difficult. | 7. Proceed from the known to the unknown. | 12. Let the pupil, as soon as possible, derive some pleasure from his knowledge. Interest can only be kept up by a sense of growth in independent power." |
| 2. Teach the thing before the sight. | 8. Let each lesson, as far as possible, rise out of that which goes before and lead up to that which follows. | |
| 3. Teach one fact at a time, and the commonest fact first. | 9. Call in the understanding to help the skill at every step. | |
| 4. Leave out all exceptions and anomalies until the general rule is understood. | 10. Let the first impression be a correct one, leave no room for misunderstanding. | |
| 5. In training the mind, teach the concrete before the abstract. | 11. Never tell a pupil anything that you can help him to discover for himself. | |
| 6. In developing physical skill, teach the elemental before the compound, and do one thing at a time. | | (Curwen, A.J., (2008). <i>Mrs Curwen's Pianoforte Method – A Guide to the Piano</i> . London: Read Books.) |

An example of how to teach systematically

Teaching quavers using the rhyme 'Coca Cola went to town'

The full rhyme is:

**“ Co-ca Co-la went to town,
Pep-si Co-la knocked him down,
Dr Pepper fixed him up,
changed him in to Sev-en Up ”**



1. Say the rhyme, marking the pulse (patting, walking or clapping) as you say it.
2. Draw four heart shapes on a small white board or paper, say the rhythm and tap the heart beats where the pulse occurs.
3. Ask how many heart beats were tapped whilst saying the first line (answer 4)
4. Say the first line of the rhyme, this time tapping the heart beats to the rhythm (*the words with their syllables broken up e.g. 'co-ca'*)
5. Put crosses on the heart beats where the taps occurred, illustrating where quaver notes appear.
6. Join the crosses up to illustrate the quavers in the rhyme showing how the beat is split.



Tool kit 2 Re-enforced teaching

Students with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia often struggle with short-term and working memory (this is explained in Tool kit 1 on the previous page). The long-term memory isn't affected, which is why it's useful to re-enforce learning (sometimes referred to as overlearning) at every opportunity. How can this be done though?

Concepts need to be taught over and over again. It's useful to do this in different contexts. The easiest way to explain this is by using examples. I've done this with the example of a way to learn a piece of music.



Learning a piece of music: some useful activities

Step 1

Before looking at the notation, explore some listening and aural activities.

- Mark the pulse
- Clap a series of rhythms taken from the piece of music.
- Identify the metre; clap the pulse stressing the first beat of each bar.
- Identify the tonality of the music: is it major or minor?
- Sing back or play back (by ear) small melodies from the music.
- Listen to the music and comment on the phrasing, dynamics and expression heard. If a version of the music can be provided with this information whited out for the student to write back in, it's a very valuable exercise. It is legal to photocopy music in such circumstances, as long as the original copy is in your possession. (See *Music Publishers' Association, Code of Fair Practice, clause 11.*)
- What is the musical context? When was it written? What is the style and period?

Step 2

Present the piece of music.

- Can the student looking at the score identify the pulse, common rhythms in the music and melodic phrases?
- Explain the structure of the music. Are there repeated sections that can reduce the amount of music to be learned?
- Think about breaking up the music into sections, rather than presenting it all at once. Students with specific learning difficulties can really struggle to break things down. Numbering these can be helpful.
- Provide a recording of the music that the student can listen to and follow the score with their finger tracing over the notes as they listen to it.

Tool kit 3 Multi-sensory

Multi-sensory music teaching uses all the senses to teach and learn music. What senses are used? Visual (seeing), auditory (hearing) and kinaesthetic (doing), as well as reading and writing (text). Even those with dyslexia can find reading and writing useful. Dalcroze, Kodály, Suzuki and Orff approaches to music teaching all include multi-sensory teaching. These respected approaches have been successfully used to teach music for many decades.

Multi-sensory teaching can really improve the motivation of students with a specific learning difficulty. In her key book, *Instrumental Music for Dyslexics: A Teaching Handbook* (Whurr, 2002), Sheila Oglethorpe emphasises this, encouraging people "to employ as many of the child's senses as possible in the hope that the stronger senses will compensate for the weaker ones". However, "multi-sensory teaching shouldn't be seen as a method to just use with students who have special needs - it has huge benefits for all."

Useful questions to ask our students

What do you hear? What do you feel? What do you see?

Teaching rhythm in a multi-sensory way

- Inviting students to walk to the pulse.
- Giving rhythm names to note values and getting students to move to the music saying their names. Crotchet - walk; quaver - jogging; minim - stride.
- Walking the pulse while clapping the rhythm (n.b. This is difficult and can take lots of practice).
- Tapping the pulse on a row of heart pictures.
- Using a systematic series of rhythm flashcards, clapping them with the pulse marked in the background (either using a metronome or keyboard drum backing).

Rhythm

Note that students with specific learning difficulties can find rhythm one of the *most* challenging things to do. Teachers need to find a method that works for the student but this must be consistent. Making this multi-sensory with hearing, visual and doing activities makes a huge difference. Physical activities linked to rhythm patterns with visual re-enforcement can be very successful.

The common ways used for teaching rhythm are:

- Counting - does the student relate to this? Can they cope with the "1 &" counting for quavers? Or are they better counting quavers singly as, for example, in 4/4 time, counting the 8 quavers in the bar. For some students counting works for them and it's a useful tool.
- Rhythm names. In my experience these are highly effective but do need to be built up gradually. A systematic set of rhythms flashcards can work well. The British Kodály Academy have these available in their on-line shop. Make sure that the terms used are consistent. Use 'ta' for crotchet, then make sure that the quaver term is totally different e.g. 'te te' or 'ti ti'. Combining rhythm names with counting can cause particular difficulty for some, though not all, so just be aware of possible confusion if you do this. Find a list of rhythm names that work well and stick to them. Various Kodály organisations around the world have lists of these in their publications. See a version of these at the end of this article.
- Words to rhythm. This can be highly successful and useful. Do take care though about words that can be pronounced differently.
- Dalcroze Eurythmics. Combining rhythm to movement as a whole body experience can, arguably, be one of the most successful approaches. Do look out for courses and experience Dalcroze Eurythmics yourself. There is enormous value in this technique. Some dyspraxic students can find this challenging but with practice and support this can be a very helpful approach to try.

The pulse

Note that rhythm is much easier to explore and progress after students can confidently mark, maintain and identify a pulse. Marking the pulse at every opportunity is a re-enforcing exercise.

Teaching pitch in a multi-sensory way

- Sing the note names to your student as they play them.
- Put a stave on the floor with masking tape (with stave lines around 10cm apart) and get your student to mark different note pitches on the stave. If the student is playing an instrument they can hold, get them to play the note on their instrument as they stand on the note position on the stave.
- Colour coding notes with colours a student personally associates with.
- Using landmark notes. For example, the G on the treble clef or F on the bass clef. These link to the clef signs on the music to provide an additional prompt for the student (who may already have difficulty remembering things). Some students with specific learning difficulties can have visual problems that make the stave dance or move. Do refer such students for testing with a specialist optometrist.
- Using recordings of the melody and following the notation with the finger to experience and hear the pitch rise, fall and stay the same.





Tool kit 4

Personal Association

Making things more memorable can help students to retain them in their long-term memory (which is not affected by a specific learning difficulty). So how can we use this in music learning and find those personal associations to make things stick?

Learning keys and the order of sharps and flats using a personal rhyme.

Many of us know the mnemonic for the orders of sharps and flats:

**“ Father Charles Goes Down And Ends Battle
Battle Ends And Down Goes Charles Father ”**

Students can find such mnemonics more helpful if they come up with one they've created that has meaning to them. I've had all kinds of ones devised by children including ones about 'Funky Chickens' 'Bogies Eaten' and many other comical versions. Students remember them far more easily if they've created them themselves.

Notation using colour or additional object prompts

As already mentioned, colour can be a very useful way for students to identify notes. In addition, some students can benefit from using additional prompts like animals or objects. There are many resources out there that teachers can investigate for working with a student. I have found though that for some students, ensuring the colour or object selected is their own personal preference is more effective. For example, remembering the note C if it's red or other notes if they are yellow. For some students, C works well related to as a cat but others students may prefer a cow!

Titles of music and creating a story

What does the title of the music make a student think about? After listening to the music can they come up with a story about the music to help them remember dynamic and other expression markings?

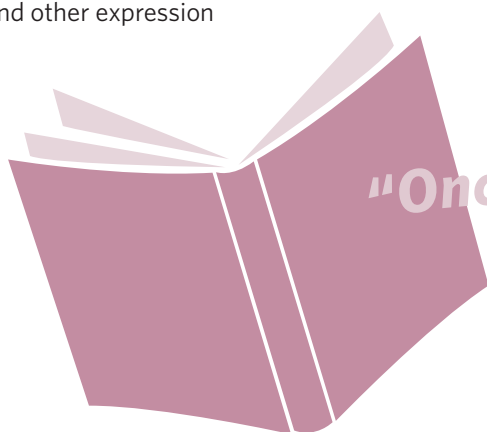
Scales stories

It can be helpful to make up stories about scales. For example, I have a number of piano pupils who use the black key positions in order to do this. Two black keys are a small bridge and three black keys represent a large bridge. If there's a white note in between then they think of jumping onto the bridge and if there isn't they step on it. As much as this wouldn't have worked in my own personal learning of scales, I have found for some it can be really helpful. I learnt very quickly that it is important to be open minded and flexible, teaching in a way that a student learns rather than expecting them to learn the way I preferred to teach.

I have also heard of students learning scales by animal names. Apparently, for one child E flat major was associated with an elephant. They could play this scale perfectly if referred to as an Elephant scale, rather than E flat major.

Composer and the musical period

Why not plot composers on a time line displaying all the musical periods? Then also highlight a student's parents or grandparents on the time line. This can help to put everything into some kind of context.



“Once upon a time there was”



Tool kit 5 Pattern

(notation shapes and teaching to personal strengths whilst compensating for weaknesses)

Pattern can be a very useful tool. I have often observed my dyslexic students learning telephone numbers via the pattern on the telephone keypad rather than knowing the number. Music is packed with pattern so this can be a quick way to de-code the music without needing to process every note.

As a teacher I've had more success getting students to identify these things aurally first and then relating them to the written score afterwards, that is: **sound before symbol**.

Here are a few tools I use to do this

- **Intervals.** I play the interval game, where a student is given an interval one week and they have to identify it in their music that week ten times. Pieces dense in particular intervals are also useful tools. Also it can be useful, for example, to understand that major 2nds always move from a note with a line going through it to a note with two lines on the top and the bottom or vice versa. Look at how you describe notes; the terminology referring to a note on the line or the note on a space can be particularly confusing for students with a specific learning difficulty.
- **Scale patterns.** Spotting these at the earliest stages is a really useful thing to do. Even just penta-scales (the first five notes of a scale) are good to spot so a student can read in a chunk, rather than reading every note.
- **Arpeggios and broken chords.** Just like spotting scale patterns, highlight these when they are in the music. Again, it's doing some of the processing for the student and re-enforcing these common patterns (notation shapes).
- **Repeated bars and sections.** Some students can simply not realise that a whole section of the music has been repeated. Highlighting the fact to students and even colour coding these repeated sections (shading it with the same coloured pencil) can be a useful memory aid.

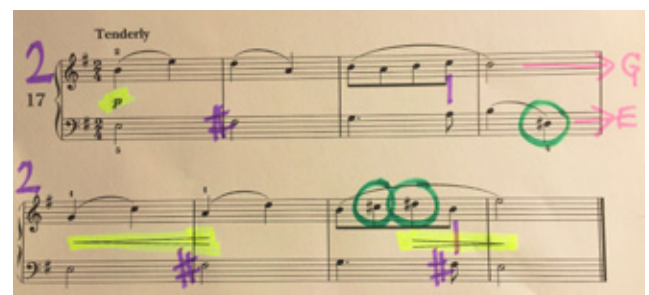
What personal strengths are common with students with a specific learning difficulty?

Common strengths can include:

- **Seeing things as a whole.** This can be referred to as 'big picture' thinking. "It's as if people with dyslexia tend to use a wide-angle lens to take in the world, while others tend to use a telephoto, each is best at revealing different kinds of detail". (Matthew H. Schneps, Harvard University, quoted in *Dyslexia and LD Advocacy Action Group*. Accessed www.dyslexiaadvocacyactiongroup.org/dyslexia.html 8/10/18.)
- **Lateral and problem solving skills.** For example, thinking outside the box to find a solution to a problem.
- **Visual skills.** Seeing things in a visual way such as thinking in pictures rather than words.
- **Spacial/3D skills.** Many of the world's top designers and architects are dyslexic. Things may be viewed in a 3D way.
- **Pattern recognition and noticing difference.** This can be both seeing a pattern and also being aware when something doesn't fit a pattern (the odd one out).

These strengths can be used to help students with things they find more difficult. For example, in sight-reading, students can annotate their scores making it more visual, though this approach needs to be practised regularly with the teacher.

Here is a possible example using an ABRSM Grade 1 sight-reading test, which is also printed on an off-white background.





Tool kit 6

Props and materials

There are certain materials that can be extremely useful to aid teaching in an accessible way. These are some of the resources I use and have in a music bag when doing peripatetic teaching.

- **Colour overlays.** These can support students who have visual difficulties. A full range of colours is available from Crossbow Education. See www.crossboweducation.com
- Consider copying music on to off-white paper and perhaps enlarging it, if that helps the student. Music can be legally copied if it is to aid a disability such as dyslexia as long as the student has the original in their possession. See www.mpaonline.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/The_Code_of_Fair_Practice_Revised_Apr_2016.pdf (Clause 11, page 11).
- **Envelope windows.** These are taken from envelopes of different sizes where there is a window for the address. They are used to isolate bars of music. Removing other information can help processing.
- **Highlighter pens.** I have one for flats, one for sharps and one for naturals. I (or the student) colours over the affected note using a colour of the student's choice. Processing key signatures can be particularly difficult so using these to mark the notes affected by it can really improve note reading.
- **Grab and go folder.** Copy all the music (making sure that the student has purchased the original), technical and theory work being studied at the time and order it in one folder, using plastic dividers. This can aid personal organisation and prevent things being forgotten or lost.
- **Illustrations of a keyboard/fret board/fingering charts with stave.** If new notes are being learnt they can be highlighted on these so that the student can easily find the notes on the instrument after leaving the lesson.
- **Flash card rhythms.** These are sequenced and gradually increase in difficulty. A variety of time values and time signatures are covered over time.
- **Large roll up stave.** I use a piece of carpet with black tape on it. The stave is large enough for a student to stand on representing the note.
- **Small cards to record pitch notes.** Handmade flash cards with note pitches on are made in the lessons for the student to keep and practice with at home. Additional personal association aids are added to these if appropriate for the student, for example making the note colour coded.
- **A full range of post it notes.** These are very useful for all kinds of things, especially the see through tiny tag like ones that can be put on the individual score. I also use these for labelling the instrument, for example on a piano putting an arrow to the right for higher notes and an arrow to the left for lower notes.
- **Colour pencils.** These can be used to shade over repeated passages in the music or to highlight the dynamics. Blocking out the bars in a colour that a student relates to as quiet or loud can be useful and ensure that the dynamics are performed.


Useful books

- Marshall, K. and Stirling, P. (2017). *How to teach Instrumental and singing lessons: 100 inspiring ideas*. London: Harper Collins. This includes practical ideas for teaching students accessibly along with a full range of other topics.
- Daunt, S. (ed.) (2012), *Music, other Performing Arts and Dyslexia*. Bracknell: BDA
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- Miles, T.R., Westcombe, J. and Ditchfield, D. (eds.) (2008), *Music and Dyslexia A Positive Approach*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

Also see the booklet *Music and inclusive teaching* and other material available at:

www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/educator/music-and-dyslexia

Rhythm names



 ta te - te ta - a ta - a - a ta - a - a - a syn-co - pa



 tai - te te - tai ti - ka - ti - ka te - ti - ka



 ti - ka - te tim - ka ka - tim tri - o - la



 te - te - te ta - te tai tim - ka - te



 ka-tim - te te - tim - ka ti - ka - ti - ka - ti - ka te - ti - ka - ti - ka

- "te" or "te te" should be pronounced as "tea" or "tea tea"
- There are various rhythm time names available – teachers should find a set best suited to individual students. This list is merely a starting point.

Top ten tips for accessible music teaching

(used with permission)

- 1** Be imaginative and patient. One size doesn't fit all: everyone is different. How does your student learn best?
- 2** The student should choose what works including reminders (such as tracking from one end of the stave to the next). Don't impose ideas.
- 3** Use colour (of the student's choice) for highlighting etc.
- 4** All activities should be very structured: chunk information; build it up.
- 5** Use multi-sensory approaches: hear; see; feel; read; write; hands on...
- 6** Consider whether visual difficulties could be a problem; try copying on to tinted paper (of the student's choice) if so and suggest an appointment with a specialist optometrist.
- 7** Use over-learning/revision/embedding: recap – repeat – give overviews and summaries – this helps with short-term memory difficulties.
- 8** Try approaches from Kodály, Dalcroze and Suzuki: remember they may not be successful with every student so keep trying until you find something that works for your pupil.
- 9** Remember: dyslexic people can take 10 times as long to complete an activity = extra tiredness and perhaps stress & poor self-esteem.
- 10** Help with organisation (in imaginative ways): use mobile phones; post-its; labels; colour-coding; texts... Use written reminders (using large, sans-serif font, if possible, not handwritten).

Queries?

Contact: bdamusicdyslexia@gmail.com

My child and dyslexia: a parent's perspective

Frances Wilson

For the parent of a dyslexic child so much is focused around the child's (and parent's) experience of the education system – a system which is supposed to be enjoyable and stimulating for children and which will broaden their horizons and equip them for entry into adulthood.

I suspected my son might be dyslexic almost as soon as he started at primary school. Dyslexia runs in my husband's family and I knew the condition could be inherited. My son was an articulate child, had quite a sophisticated vocabulary in advance of his age and was even able to recognise quite complex words when written down, but he really struggled with reading from the outset. This was the first indicator that there was a problem and it remained a significant issue for my son until he was mid-way through secondary school. The ability to read and process written information is a key functional skill; without it, I worried that my son would struggle with straightforward everyday tasks such as completing forms or travelling – would he be able to read road signs or train station names? And if he couldn't, would he get lost when travelling on his own?

Reading homework was always a trial, usually resulting in stress, tears and frustration. Written homework proved equally painful, as my son struggled to hold a pencil and form words. I saw no value in making him engage in an activity which was clearly upsetting him and gradually eroding his confidence: growing maturity and awareness meant that he knew he was far behind in class. My cheerful, bright (yes, *bright*) little boy had turned into a frustrated, uncertain child and I, an anxious parent who didn't know where to turn. So much emphasis is placed on 'attainment' in our education system and a child who falls below the set norms/targets is considered 'educationally subnormal'. It was pretty devastating because I knew my son was bright – just not *academically* bright.

This for so many parents of dyslexic children is the difficult paradox that we face: our children often have average or above-average intelligence. Some are gifted or have a very high IQ, but there's a discrepancy between their potential and their achievement as measured by standard school tests.

Throughout school, my son felt like a square peg in a round hole. Singled out for Special Educational Needs (SEN) support, he knew he was different, isolated in a school in an affluent, high-achieving suburb of south-west London. The school was reluctant to have him assessed, and hinted on more than one occasion that I should be doing more to support my son's learning. Since I am neither a teacher nor a dyslexia specialist, this was an impossible task. In the end, after many meetings with the headmaster and head of SEN provision in the school, with me often in tears, begging the school to do something, they reluctantly agreed to have him assessed by an educational psychologist who identified the dyslexia and recommended that he be statemented for special educational needs.

This came when my son was 10: I had been telling the school that dyslexia ran in the family since Year 1! The statementing had very little impact on my son's progress in his final year at primary school, but by that time I didn't really care about his SATS results. I was desperate for some improvement in his confidence and self-esteem.





Fortunately, his secondary school had a far more proactive attitude and good SEN provision was made ahead of his arrival at the school. The head of SEN was an intelligent young woman who was fully conversant with the most up-to-date research on dyslexia. She was sympathetic and kind and went out of her way to make my son feel included, where previously he had felt excluded. She was also highly perceptive and quickly recognised that he was bright, but bored. The state education system, with its emphasis on regular testing as a measure of progress, is hard for dyslexic children because of the way they receive, decode and process information. Dyslexic children may be bright, but they take longer than other children to get through their schoolwork. The dyslexic brain is wired to do different things to the non-dyslexic brain, and while dyslexics tend to be very good at lateral thinking or “seeing the bigger picture”, these skills are not recognised or valued in an increasingly narrow education system where rote learning and The Three Rs rule. As a consequence, dyslexic children can grow bored and frustrated within the narrow confines of mainstream schooling.

For my son – and other dyslexics – reading and writing were laborious and tiring, and he would regularly come home from school exhausted and bad-tempered, yet unable to get to sleep at night because he was anxious about what the next day at school might bring. He was bullied by other students, including his former best friend who claimed that being dyslexic meant he could not skateboard or ski, and on one occasion a teacher called him “stupid” because of his lack of application in class. Some days I would keep him

off school so we could do pleasant relaxing things together (cooking and art, or a walk in the park), just to take the pressure off him. I found the effort of supporting and advocating for him equally exhausting.

Frustrated, demotivated and bored at school, by 15 my son’s behaviour had become particularly challenging. He fell in with a rather unpleasant group of boys and took to missing school and staying out at all hours, or not coming home at all, preferring to sleep over at a friend’s house. If we criticised his behaviour, he would become argumentative and on occasion aggressive.

Strangely, alongside this rather difficult scenario and a generally negative attitude to school, my son was now reading, though not at the expected level for his age. The breakthrough occurred a couple of years previously during a holiday in Italy, when we were confined to our apartment due to bad weather: he picked up a book and suddenly he was reading, unaided, reasonably fluently, and, more importantly, enjoying it. Perhaps it was because the pressure was off: away from school he could choose to read, rather being expected to read. Other mini milestones followed, largely due to the support of two particular teachers who recognised and encouraged a bright spark of creativity in my son, and when previously he was scoring Ds and Es for tests, my son was now achieving Bs and Cs. As he approached his GCSEs there was a noticeable improvement in his confidence. He was offered a place at a local college to study professional cooking and he gained better-than-expected GCSE results, for which he received a special prize from the school. While he refused to return to the school to collect the prize (understandably, he wanted to put the negative experiences of school

behind him), it was a significant moment and he entered his college course with a distinct spring in his step - and beautiful new chef's 'whites' in his rucksack. Within weeks of commencing his course, he was a different person. Regularly scoring Distinctions for his practical work, he was now top of the class where previously he had been consigned to the bottom. He had found his creative niche and a practical skill in which he could excel. He forged (and has retained) strong working relationships with his tutors, who treated him with respect (something often lacking in school), and went on to attain a Level 3 Diploma in Professional Cooking. He is now a chef at a top hotel in London's Mayfair.

It can be tough, being the parent of a dyslexic child, and it's all too easy to let the label define your child - and you. Other people can be very judgemental, often under the guise of being well-meaning; there were some who suggested my son was lazy or stupid or that I had failed as a parent because he didn't read until he was at secondary school. Such attitudes reveal how much ignorance still surrounds learning difficulties like dyslexia - from both teachers and educators and other parents. As a consequence, my son and I had to develop higher levels of resilience and some days it was very hard to remain positive.

We all want the best for our children, and, as a parent, I believe it is our job to support, encourage and advocate for them, as far as possible. We must enable them to achieve and thrive, and instill in them a confidence and a sense of self-worth. I was determined that my should understand his strengths, and differences, and that we celebrated them. We discussed dyslexia openly at home, citing the achievements of famous dyslexics such as Richard Branson and Albert Einstein. As it turned out, a subject such as professional cooking, which combines highly-skilled technical application with creativity, suited my son perfectly: lateral

thinking, problem-solving and the ability to spot connections between different ideas, objects or points of view - all dyslexic 'strengths' which my son possesses - proved an asset in a fast-paced restaurant kitchen, and he drew much inspiration from the achievements of Jamie Oliver, who is also dyslexic.

I never pushed my son while he was at school, because I recognised that this would be counter-productive. Instead, I did my best to support him to enable him to find his own way in this competitive world. Today my son, at 20, is a confident young man with a burgeoning professional career, mature-beyond-his years, and living in his own flat. He reads books by Noam Chomsky and George Orwell, and can articulately express his views on world politics, or current trends in food and the hospitality industry - and much more. I am immensely proud of him and respectful of the struggles he endured to get to where he is now. He knows he could walk back into his primary and secondary schools with his head held high and display his achievements. In that need to find one's niche and true passion, and to celebrate one's personal achievements lies the success of the dyslexia story.

Frances Wilson is a pianist, piano teacher, music reviewer, writer and blogger on classical music and pianism as The Cross-Eyed Pianist. Her son, Max, is a Chef de Partie at The Connaught in Mayfair.

www.crosseyedpianist.com

Frances' son has achieved creatively as a chef, but this story could equally be the tale of a musical young person achieving through music.



Dyslexia and self-esteem in relation to music

Sally Daunt



For so many students, this is a common phrase, but particularly so for those with a Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD) such as dyslexia or dyspraxia. Lack of self-esteem can be a common 'secondary' feature of dyslexia and other SpLDs. That is, it is not a defining feature, but is often a result of years of apparent under-achievement.

Students presenting themselves for support at Higher Education almost always recount stories of being told they were 'slow' or 'stupid' in their school years and of few people other than 'my Mum and Dad' believing in them. No wonder that such individuals come to lessons, including their music lessons, continually saying 'Sorry'.

As Sheila Oglethorpe, the author of *Instrumental music for dyslexics* so rightly puts it, 'Without a certain amount of self-esteem the student will find progress in learning very slow and demoralising' ('Teacher Guide to Music and Dyslexia' published by the 'Music Teacher' online). We all know of the bad old days of music teachers emphasising only what was wrong in a pupil's performance, rapping students over the knuckles when a false note occurred and so on. Paul Harris quotes a pupil whose teacher 'tut-tutted her way through my playing shaking her head at every note' (p.9 *Simultaneous Learning: The definitive guide*, published by Faber). If a student is already lacking in self-esteem, then constant reminders of apparent failure and mistakes will reinforce this and lead perhaps to a life-long dislike of music altogether: probably not what any of us would wish!

As music teachers, particularly those of working one-to-one or in small groups, we are in a privileged position to build up a student's self-confidence. If the student is not progressing, or not apparently understanding, we should stop and think, not about the pupil so much as about ourselves! There is the advice (variously attributed), that if a pupil cannot learn in the way that we teach, then perhaps we should teach in the way that they learn.

Key to this approach is:

- Flexibility
- Imagination, both our own and the pupils
- Thinking 'outside the box'
- Listening to our students – and not talking too much ourselves
- Exploring aspects of music with our students
- Finding and reinforcing our students' strengths.

All of this does not mean that one cannot be critical and certainly there is no future in giving undeserved praise. Pupils should be shown how to be critical of their own work and how useful this can be.

Teacher and pupil can work together on

- Creating strategies for future practice
- Recording success
- Making a note of areas to be queried with the teacher or/and areas that need improvement.

Such 'notes' can be in many forms and ideally the pupil should choose how this is done.

Approaches can include:

- Written lists; bullet points
- Lists using colour, perhaps coding different types of practice or different points (rhythm; pitch; phrasing...)
- Using post-its on a board or in a notebook
- Online lists on the student's phone (in 'Notes'?) or emailed or within the teacher's blog or...
- Mind maps (Google for examples)

Such approaches might seem to have strayed from the subject of 'self-esteem' but they have a common theme: working with the student: s/he is not 'a mere pawn in your superior scheme' as Sheila Oglethorpe puts it (Teacher Guide). If you hate the idea of highlighting in different colours on music but your pupil loves it, then go with that and go with his or her choice of colours, but perhaps photocopy the music first so that marks can be made on that. Photocopying in such a situation is permissible, as long one has the original copy (Music Publishers' Association Code of Fair Practice, p.11, clause 11). Marking a score can be done by pupils themselves even though this may be less neat and take longer.

Performance in front of others can be a great boost to self-esteem, but only, of course if (a) it goes well and (b) the pupil wants to do it in the first place. Perhaps a duet with the teacher or another pupil is a good way in and it is useful for a pupil to play in front of small groups first (parents, friends...) before attempting a full concert appearance. **If the pupil wants to do it**, is an important pre-requisite for music exams as well, which may often be encouraged by parents (or teachers!) but merely result in lowering the candidate's self-esteem if things do not go well. There are exams provided by all four of the main boards (ABRSM, Trinity, London and Rockschoo) which do not include scales or aural and these may be more suitable for a dyslexic candidate who really struggles with these areas and who is unlikely to be considering Conservatoire entrance. The British Dyslexia Association's Music Committee can advise on suitable alternatives.

Contact them at bdamusicdyslexia@gmail.com for this and further advice on music and dyslexia.

The book *Creative Successful Dyslexic* tells the story of 23 high achievers, including some musicians and other performing artists. Share such stories with your dyslexic pupils, give them a clap as often as you can and eventually they may stop saying 'Sorry' quite so often!

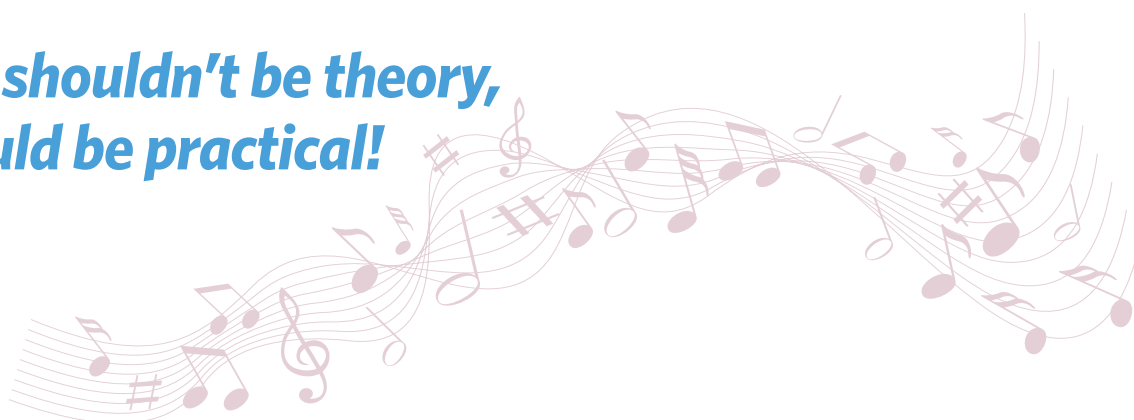
Sally Daunt is a member of the British Dyslexia Association's Music Committee and a study skills support tutor in Higher Education. She was a piano and general music teacher for many years.

Music theory: accessible approaches

Sally Daunt

Most, if not all of the points in this section should work equally well with all music pupils, of whatever age and previous experience and of whatever learning difference they may have: dyslexic, dyspraxia, Autistic Spectrum Disorder or none at all. All individuals should benefit.

**Theory shouldn't be theory,
it should be practical!**



We can easily forget how complex music is:

stave key signatures
direction (right/left/up/down)
notes rests articulation **ties**
repeats
accidentals **phrasing** clefs
dots time signatures

For a student who struggles with written instructions (a common feature of dyslexia and some other Specific Learning Difficulties or SpLDs), all this can be overwhelming and off-putting. But students with SpLDs may excel at the creative and practical.

How to balance those features?

Is theory really needed?

Understanding of music theory is not always required. Sir Paul McCartney does not read or write music and he's done OK as a musician! Rather than dots on the page, music for him and many people including Asian and jazz musicians, work with music as sound alone. Although an understanding of notation is crucial for many aspects of study, there are exams, such as the ABRSM's Practical Musicianship tests which can be taken as an alternative to the standard music theory exams and although sight-reading is still required in Musicianship, this may be a viable alternative for some candidates who find writing a real challenge.

Key Strategies

Use the 'MOPS' approaches (to mop up the knowledge?)

- Multi-sensory
- Overlearned (revision/repetition)
- Personalised
- Systematic and structured

These will help with short-term memory difficulties and help to embed concepts into the long-term memory.

These approaches are explained fully in Karen Marshall's 'tool kit' and reference to that will give many excellent ideas for work in music theory. To reinforce the points, however, here are some reminders.



Multi-sensory

Seeing – listening – feeling/touching/doing

The more that we can use all our senses when experiencing new ideas and learning concepts, the better (usually). Beware the 'Find your student's learning style' approach: this is outdated. Far better is to use as many **different** learning approaches with all individuals.

- Use a huge stave on the floor which students can move over: jumping intervals, 'playing' and singing scales etc.
- You can buy these online (search for 'floor keyboard' or 'floor stave' online) or there are also suggestions for how to make them online.
- **Listen to and say** rhythms through 'French' time names (used in the Dalcroze approach. Again, see Karen Marshall's points).
- Use wooden rhythm 'domino' type blocks to create simple & compound time rhythms – very hands on. A box of these is available from 'Beat Blox' in the UK. See <http://oddsandendpins.blogspot.com/2010/09/beat-blox.html>

Overlearning

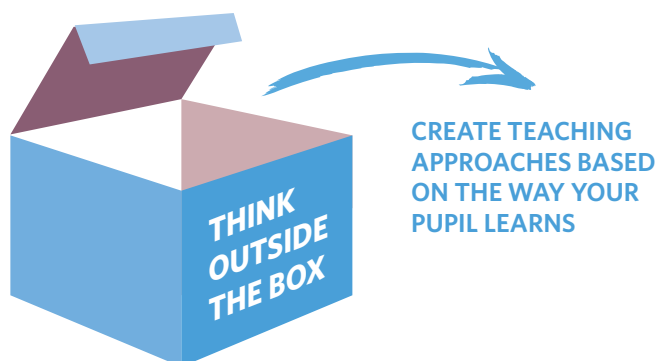
Repetition and revision (perhaps using different approaches) can really embed a concept in the long-term memory. But make sure that it's right first!

Use flash cards to make revision fun. For example, you can put the 'done' key signatures in one bag so that you know you've got through all the ones needed at any stage/grade.

An 'overlearning' activity can be called a 'game', 'revision', 'reinforcement' and so on, depending on the age, expectation and background of the student.

Personalised

Encourage students to make up their own mnemonics or rhymes (if they are something that helps that individual) – the sillier may be the better!



- **Move to different rhythms and tempi** – again see Dalcroze ideas.
- Make the shapes of different intervals in the air, whilst singing them and then sing again whilst moving a finger over written notation
- **Listen to scales** sung and/or played by the teacher (or a friend), then sing them, play them (which will involve the kinaesthetic, that is the doing); look at the shape on a keyboard – both a real one and the floor one.
- On an instrument play a scale with eyes closed and concentrate on **feeling** the fingering, then do the fingering without actually playing.
- Don't think that tonic sol fa is outmoded! For many students, this can be a real help to **hearing** and internalising scales and melodies.
- **Clap** and use **percussion** instruments to support rhythm work by doing and hearing.

Systematic and structured

Structure lessons by:

- Outlining the content
- Summarising during the session
- Summarising again at the end

- Chunk information into 'bite-sized' gobbets. The size of the bite will depend on the pupil.
- Break down tasks into these bite-sized bits.
- Create small and manageable targets

Systematic learning means making sure of one concept or skill before going on to another which may build on that.

And perhaps 'MOPS' should really be 'MOPSI' because the other crucial approach is:

Imagination

Encourage your student's imagination too.

Listen to music (played by the teacher sometimes; sometimes a recording) – and this could be the new piece or one that's being learned: is there a story being told? Can the pupil actually paint or draw a picture of it?

These activities can be geared to all standards and all ages. They are not just for beginners or for Grade 1.

Theory books

Theory books are for the teacher more than the pupil! Nothing is more soul destroying than working through a theory book on its own.

Guidelines in them are useful, of course, but use them as tick lists and reference points and relate all theoretical points to the practical.

Indeed, start from the practical and draw out theory points. Then when Grade 5 theory rears its head: surprise, surprise: the pupil will already know all or most of the material needed because it's been embedded in every instrumental or singing lesson all the time.

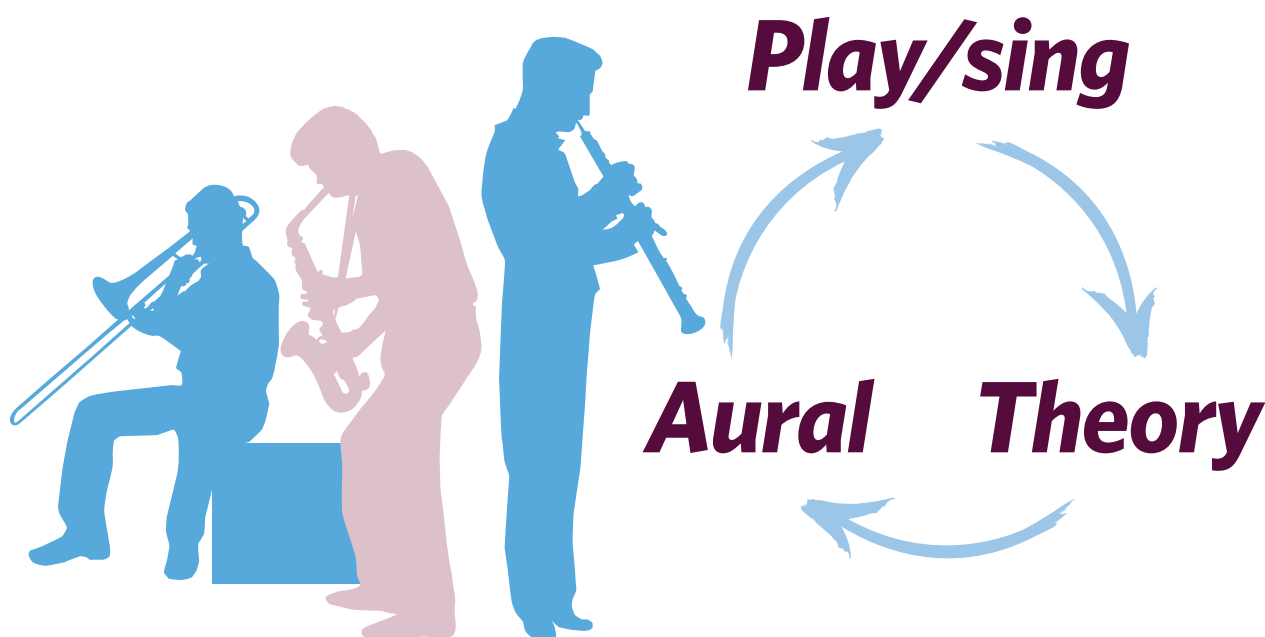
Work from the practical

Look at *The Echo* from ABRSM's Piano Grade 1 syllabus 2019 & 2020. This piece can, even at this 'early' stage introduce or reinforce the 'theory' points of:

- Key signature
- Time signature
- Metre
- Note values
- Rests and their values
- Dotted notes
- Bar lines
- Notes above the stave
- Chords and their relationship to key
- Dynamics
- Musical terms ('Pastorale')
- Metronome marks
- Triplets
- Accent

So – ask about these from time to time; point out any of the fourteen musical aspects listed above and relate them to written questions, perhaps on flash cards: 'test' without it being a test! Constantly link all this to aural as well.

Don't do any musical activity in isolation



Some useful sources

- Harris, Paul. *Improve your theory* – different grades. London: Faber Music.
- Harris, Paul. (2016) *Simultaneous Learning: Practice Starters* (flash cards). London: Faber Music.
- Marshall, K. & Stirling, P. (2017), *How to teach Instrumental and singing lessons: 100 inspiring ideas*.
- Oglethorpe, Sheila (2002), *Instrumental music for dyslexics: A teaching handbook* (2nd ed.) London: Whurr Publishers. Look particularly at Chapter 7: 'Musical theory – coping with writing music'.

Lesson Plans for an ABRSM piano repertoire piece: a multi-sensory approach

Karen Marshall

B:2

The Echo

No. 14 from *Mayflowers*, Op. 61

Theodor Oesten
(1813-70)

It is illegal to make unauthorized copies of this copyright music.

Pastorale [$\text{♩} = c.96$]

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14

Theodor Oesten, a German composer and pianist, studied in Berlin and later became popular as a music teacher. He wrote a large number of piano pieces with attractive titles.

The opening motive recurs in b. 5, and then, in a varied form, in b. 9. For the echoes, the composer uses not only *f/pp* contrasts but also transposition to a higher octave. The performance direction 'Pastorale' suggests that these echoes take place in the countryside.

Source: *May-flowers...25 short, very easy and amusing pieces for the piano forte*, Op. 61 (London: Robert Cocks & Co., 1850)

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AB 3903



PITCH

- Listen to your teacher play the piece. Can you hear any patterns?
- Can you sing the first bar back to your teacher?
- Can you play these notes by ear? The starting note is a B.
- Find the notes B A G and the D above, across the whole of the keyboard, using finger 3, 2, 1, 5 of the right hand. Play slowly, far enough up the piano keys so the fingers can feel the three black keys and their position in relation to the fingers.
- Can you do this with your eyes closed, focusing on the distance? If you hit a different note to what it should be, open your eyes and check the distance, how far were you away?
- Have a look at the right hand of the music, do you notice any patterns or differences? Where do some triad broken chords appear? (Your teacher can explain a triad to you). Listening to your teacher play this, can you follow the music score with your finger tracing the notes as they are played?
- Can you sight read the first 8 bars, how has the pattern changed in the last beat of bar 7? Is this worth highlighting with an erasable highlighter pen to remind you? Now read the second 8 bars if you can. Mark in different patterns if helpful.
- Listen to your teacher play the left hand chords. Which ones are the same and which are different?
- Mark in the music the D major triad - have a look at bar 4.
- There are only four chords used in the whole of the LH. Some are in different octaves but use the same notes. What are these notes?



TIME

- Tap the pulse as you listen to the music. Repeat this tapping the first beat of the bar louder marking the three time.
- How many notes do you hear on the first beat of the bar (this can be very difficult to hear); if you need to, check the music. Do you understand what a triplet is?
- Listen to the music a bar at a time; can you echo back the rhythm clapping? Your teacher can clap with you to help if needed.
- Play bar 1 and 3 of the right hand with the pulse marked in the background. Say the word 'Tri-o-la' as you play the triplet.
- Can you make flashcards of all of the rhythms in the music? Can you practice clapping them?
- Can you work out any words to go with the rhythms or your teacher could teach you the French time names to go with the music (see appendix).



TONE

- Listen to your teacher play the piece. Can you come up with an action to mark when the music is loud and when it is quieter?
- Listen to your teacher play the music and raise your hand every time you hear the music accented. Can you mark in the accents on your music using an erasable high lighter pen?
- If helpful, shade in a colour of your choice, the bars that are forte in one colour and the bars that are piano in another (some people like red for forted and pale blue for piano but do pick your own colours).



SHAPE

- As you listen to the music, can you draw the phrases in the air from left to right using your index finger noticing the short and longer phrases?
- The piece is in G major, can you play the first five notes of the scale G A B C D C B A G with crescendo and decrescendo?



PERFORMANCE

- Have a look at the music, how does the title relate to how the music is written on the page?
- Record yourself playing the music. Did you manage to include all the phrasing, dynamics and articulation?
- Can you create a story for the piece that you can visualise while playing it?

n.b. Students do not need to complete all the activities. A range have been provided so that the most appropriate and helpful can be selected. All students are different so do not be concerned if an activity that works for one individual is not as successful with another. Perhaps ask students "What do you think works best for you when learning a new piece?"

Music, dyslexia and access arrangements

Sally Daunt



Dyslexia, Music and exams

Learning to play an instrument or to sing presents particular challenges for people with dyslexia.

Sally Daunt, from the British Dyslexia Association, summarises the issues involved and suggests strategies for supporting students.

Why should we, as music teachers, parents, carers, candidates or examiners be bothered about dyslexia? Well, it is generally accepted that dyslexia affects 10% of the population and it can affect musical activity.

What is dyslexia?

Dyslexia is one of a number of Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs) and may overlap with others: dyspraxia, dyscalculia, attention deficit (and hyperactivity) disorder and autistic spectrum disorders.

The British Dyslexia Association describes it as 'a combination of abilities and difficulties that affect the learning process'. It can affect reading, spelling, writing and music – both theory and practical. It's lifelong, can vary in

severity, is independent of intelligence and is hereditary. Helpful strategies can certainly be developed and, importantly, dyslexic individuals may have particular strengths in areas such as design, problem solving (think of Albert Einstein) and creative skills (think of Nigel Kennedy or Cher).

How do I recognise dyslexia?

One of the key indicators of dyslexia is a mismatch between someone's perceived intellectual ability and the way that person works day to day.

Tasks may take a surprisingly long time and there may be problems with the speed of processing information, short-term memory, organisation, spoken language and motor skills. There can also be problems with

auditory and/or visual perception, including 'visual stress' – a distortion of text or musical notation.

Many activities require much extra effort for dyslexic individuals, leading to exhaustion and stress: look out for this. Dyslexic people may also have low self-esteem, so encouragement and patience are key.

There are short tests designed to flag up the probability of dyslexic difficulties (not a diagnosis) as well as full diagnostic assessments (see the BDA website for information). For school-age pupils, speak to the school's Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo).



How does dyslexia affect music learning?

Commonly reported difficulties with music include reading notation, especially at sight, and learning new music quickly.

Remembering interval names and the number of sharps or flats in a key signature, and recognising cadences can all cause problems. Taking information from written music, especially fingerings, and applying them to the instrument can be difficult. Aural work is often challenging.

How can you support a pupil with dyslexia?

All strategies need to be individualised. Pupils, however young, know best what helps them, so ask!

Help with visual stress

Visual stress can be helped with individually chosen tinted paper, coloured overlays and/or enlargement, including Modified Stave Notation – Google that!

Specialist tinted glasses and/or use of technology that modifies the format of music can be useful (find out more from the BDA).

Remember, it is legal to photocopy music to make it easier for someone who 'has a cognitive impairment such as dyslexia' to read, as long as the original is taken into the exam or performance.

Teaching strategies

It may be that written music isn't always necessary and, as an alternative, improvisation and memorisation can both be fulfilling.

All strategies need to be individualised. Pupils, however young, know best what helps them, so ask ... good strategies for dyslexic pupils are usually really good general teaching strategies too!

Multi-sensory approaches are also helpful. For example, work on intervals by making shapes in the air or steps on the ground, reinforce metre through movement, and physically demonstrate terms such as 'high/low' and 'right/left'. Using colour can be useful, with pupils choosing preferences and annotating music themselves.

For short-term memory problems, try chunking or breaking down. Aural can be treated in this way, gradually building up to longer phrases. Generally, be sure of one point or skill before moving on. Use over-learning or revision with plenty of time to firm up skills.

Both Dalcroze and Kodály are worth exploring for their dyslexia-friendly approaches. Indeed, good strategies for dyslexic pupils are usually really good general teaching strategies too!

Support with organisation

Organisation can be difficult for some dyslexic people. Do you know a student who constantly turns up for lessons without the right music or at the wrong time or place? That person may be dyslexic. 'To do' lists can be attached to music cases – less likely to get lost! Send texts/emails and encourage students to put reminders on their phones. Have a website with useful information and perhaps videos with 'how to practise' demonstrations. Be imaginative!

Taking an exam

Many aspects of dyslexia can affect exams. Accessing sight-reading and written material can be difficult for SpLD candidates.





Short-term memory problems can affect aural tests. Verbal instructions can also be difficult. Think about the following: 'Please play B ... harmonic ... minor ... a third apart ... staccato'. A dyslexic candidate may well have forgotten the key by the end of such a sentence.

Making adjustments

ABRSM and other exam boards offer 'reasonable adjustments' for candidates with a large range of disabilities. They don't make the exam easier, but do create a level playing field. Remember, dyslexia is a 'disability' and it is illegal to discriminate against disabled people.

To benefit from these adjustments, candidates must have written proof of their dyslexia - you can contact the BDA or ABRSM if you need help here. You also need to include the correct information when making an exam entry. ABRSM's Access Co-ordinator can explain the range of possible adjustments, which include extra time and modification of written papers and sight-reading. Depending on the adjustment, you may need to send examples of the type of paper/print needed to ABRSM.

Elements of the exam

In the aural tests that include listening to a musical example or phrase, candidates may be able to ask for the question to be repeated. Also, if a candidate answers and it seems that they have misunderstood the question, the examiner may restate the question and ask them to answer again.

Additional attempts at the scales may be possible and candidates may be able to use a scale book for reference - or the unaccompanied traditional song words, for singers.

There may also be options to annotate sight-reading tests during preparation, using colour if that helps, and to make notes of verbal instructions during the exam.

Do remember, you will need prior approval from ABRSM for these options, so they can provide special copies and meet any other requests. Adjustments cannot be approved on the day of the exam by the examiner.

Other options

Finally, don't forget ABRSM's Performance Assessment, which provides another option and may be more appropriate for some musicians with dyslexia. ■

Sally Daunt is Chair of the British Dyslexia Association music committee and a support tutor at the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts.

Where to find out more

ABRSM

For full details of our provision for candidates with dyslexia, dyspraxia and other learning difficulties:
www.abrsm.org/specificneeds

British Dyslexia Association

Search for music at
www.bdadyslexia.org.uk
 Or email the BDA Music team for more information: bdamusicdyslexia@gmail.com

Incorporated Society of Musicians

The ISM has a free webinar on music and dyslexia:
www.ism.org/professional-development/webinars

Music Publishers Association

For information about photocopying, see page 11 of the MPA's Code of Fair Practice:
www.mpaonline.org.uk/content/code-fair-practice



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