

A PILOT STUDY OF DYSLEXIA AND MUSIC IN A CONSERVATOIRE SETTING

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Background

Within dyslexia research a number of theories have emerged to explain its occurrence. Phonological deficits seem to play a primary role although contention remains as to the exact nature of these deficits. Two possible causes have been recently suggested: a dysfunction in transient auditory processing caused by a deficit in magnocellular processing, and a deficit in cerebellar processing creating a global deficit in the ability to process automatically.

Whilst dyslexia research has generally centred on literacy, anecdotal evidence has accumulated to suggest that dyslexics, whilst often having a good ear, have difficulty processing musical information.

Aims

A pilot study is being conducted with conservatoire students, using a specially designed questionnaire, with assistance from the British Dyslexia Association Music Board, to investigate their behaviours and learning strategies in reading and writing text and music and to identify the instance of dyslexic type problems within a complete conservatoire population. Detailed case studies will then further explore these learning behaviours.

Method

A structured questionnaire was chosen so that a large number of students ($n=700$) could be targeted and in order to gain information about the connections between dyslexia and musical learning. Conservatoire level musicians were used as there is an expected level of proficiency in reading and processing music compared to the general population. The reading of music has also been targeted rather than all aspects of musical learning, as this is another possible benchmark area which can be quantified and directly correlated with text reading skills from dyslexia research.

Results

$N=700$ questionnaires were distributed with a response rate $n=86$ (12.29%). Data analysis and evaluation is ongoing at present, the outcomes of which will be presented.