

Successful Strategies of Individuals with Dyslexia in the Field of Music: A Comparative Case Study.

Kent Nelson, DMA
Boston University
kpnelson@graniteschool.org

Abstract

Many of the traits of dyslexia, such as decoding written symbols, phonological awareness, rhythmic processing, physical coordination, and poor handwriting may adversely affect learning music. Despite these issues, some individuals with dyslexia succeed in making a living in the field of music. This study used a hermeneutics perspective in qualitative research case studies to examine the lives of six respected members of the music profession who have dyslexia. The purpose of this study was to answer the following research questions: what strategies and coping skills did these musicians use to succeed despite their learning difficulties? What special talents and traits have these musicians brought to the music profession? And what implications may be drawn from this study for school and private music educators, parents, and students to help better understand how individuals with dyslexia learn music? This study's findings included support for: multisensory learning and teaching, individual and/or small group instruction, the use of technology as an aid, and the learning of jazz and popular music. Most of the six participants also thought their dyslexia enhanced certain aspects of their musicianship. The participants offered advice on finding private teachers for dyslexic children and recommended personal acceptance and disclosure of their dyslexia to others, including teachers and other adults who can serve as their advocates.