

Musical Notation Reading versus Alphabet Reading-Comparison and Implications for Teaching Music Reading to Students with Dyslexia

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Abstract : Reading is a cognitive process of deciphering visual signs to produce meaning. During the reading process, written information of symbols and signs is received in the person's eye and processed in the brain. This definition is relevant to both the reading of letters and the reading of musical notation. But while the letters of the alphabet are signs determined arbitrarily, notes are recorded systematically on a staff, with the location of each note on the staff indicating its relative pitch. In this paper, the researcher specifies the characteristics of alphabet reading in comparison to musical notation reading, and discusses the question whether a person diagnosed with dyslexia will necessarily have difficulty in reading musical notes. Dyslexia is a learning disorder that makes it difficult to acquire alphabet-reading skills due to difficulties expressed in the identification of letters, spelling, and other language deciphering skills. In order to read, one must be able to connect a symbol with a sound and to join the sounds into words. A person who has dyslexia finds it difficult to translate a graphic symbol into the sound that it represents. When teaching reading to children diagnosed with dyslexia, the multi-sensory approach, supporting the activation and involvement of most of the senses in the learning process, has been found to be particularly effective. According to this approach, when most senses participate in the reading learning process, it becomes more effective. During years of experience, the researcher, who is a music specialist, has been following the music reading learning process of elementary school age students, some of them diagnosed with Dyslexia, while studying to play soprano (descant) recorder. She argues that learning music reading while studying to play a musical instrument is a multi-sensory experience by its nature. The senses involved are: sight, hearing, touch, and the kinesthetic sense (motion), which provides the brain with information on the relative positions of the body. In this way, the learner experiences simultaneously visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic impressions. The researcher concludes that there should be no contra-indication for teaching standard music reading to children with dyslexia if an appropriate process is offered. This conclusion is based on two main characteristics of music reading: (1) musical notation system is a systematic, logical, relative set of symbols written on a staff; and (2) music reading learning connected with playing a musical instrument is by its nature a multi-sensory activity since it combines sight, hearing, touch, and movement. This paper describes music reading teaching procedures and provides unique teaching methods that have been found to be effective for students who were diagnosed with Dyslexia. It provides theoretical explanations in addition to guidelines for music education practices.

Keywords : alphabet reading, dyslexia, multisensory teaching method, music reading, recorder playing

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