

Unsung heroes.

By Michael Lea 6/3/11 second draft 497 words for BDA Contact magazine – deadline march.

In order to prosper in the demanding world of professional musicmaking it is necessary to know what you are doing, to have a robust technique that works in all situations, all day, every day, year after year.

By 1987 when I first came across Gillingham, I had been a professional musician for 20 years. I knew immediately that Gillingham worked, and from my experience as a professional musician, why it worked. Multisensory and sequential teaching, words sometimes used to describe Gillingham's methods, are exactly what learning to play an instrument involves. Training the neurological connections in a dependable way is the 'name of the game' in both Gillingham and learning to play a musical instrument.

I was shocked to learn at that time that our schools did not offer literacy teaching that worked for everyone. In 1990 Barnet Council published a report on reading in schools in Barnet. The same year in America Lieberman and Lieberman published a paper which predicted a 25% failure rate for the methods that were at that time used in Barnet. Subsequent testing has shown that the Lieberman's prediction has been born out not just in Barnet but across the country.

What was I to do knowing that the failure to teach literacy effectively in our schools was completely unnecessary. To start with I joined the Barnet dyslexia Association and was soon on the committee. Over the years we tracked what was happening in Barnet, helped where we were able and organised regular public talks on all aspects of dyslexia . Through one of these talks which was given by Violet Brand, I was invited onto the BDA Music and Dyslexia Committee.

The music and dyslexia committee was an eye-opener for me. Here were a bunch of determined knowledgeable people providing effective help for dyslexics, and doing so in the nicest possible way.

The committee had organised extra time for dyslexics in music exams. This pioneering achievement has since spread throughout academia. Sheila Oglethorpe, a member of the committee, had already published a book on music and dyslexia. Prof Tim Miles had many publications to his name. With their advice and contributions by themselves and others, we published two books on music and dyslexia. Most recently we have organized, with the help of the BDA, two highly successful conferences.

Over the years I have on every occasion available to me written extolling the virtues of Gillingham. I have written to newspapers, individual journalists, academics, and Parliamentary committees. In the course of this writing my views have developed and simplified. I suggest that Gillingham, in the context of the spreading failure of literacy teaching, researched and published a comprehensive method for teaching literacy skills on a

one-to-one basis for those failing in class. It seems to me the way forward now is to apply Gillingham back to whole classroom teaching so that everyone can again be successful.