

The Orton-Gillingham Language Approach

- A Research Review

Table of Contents

	Page(s)
I. Executive Summary.....	3
II. Program Overview.....	4-5
III. Review of Research.....	5-6
IV. Program Benefits.....	7
V. Conclusion.....	7
VI. Work Cited.....	8

I. Executive Summary

The Orton-Gillingham (O-G) Language Approach is based on the belief that incorporating specific skills in the educational process has a positive impact on the students' ability to learn how to read, write and spell. Teachers of the O-G method engage all learners by presenting concepts in ways that visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile learners can grasp.

In 2000, the National Reading Panel supported the Orton-Gillingham direct systematic phonics instruction and found all their presented findings through a comprehensive, formal, evidence-based analysis of the research literature. Evidence-based facts clearly showed that direct systematic phonics programs present the most effective method of providing students an accurate foundation of phonological decoding for higher level reading skills.

Numerous intervention programs such as *Alphabetic Phonics*, *Project Read*, or *Wilson Reading System* are derived from the O-G approach. *Nessy Learning* is one of such programs. It believes that when children laugh during instruction, learning becomes more meaningful and impactful. Their philosophy stems from the premise that when children play games the increased level of engagement results in dramatic academic improvements. This philosophy is combined with a highly structured incremental system based on the Orton-Gillingham principles of learning. *Nessy Learning* is closely aligned to the O-G approach as evidenced in the following program characteristics:

- In *Nessy Learning*, children receive individualized instruction tailored to meet their specific needs.
- *Nessy Learning* is flexible to allow for various learning styles (visual, kinesthetic, auditory, tactile).
- *Nessy Learning*'s phonics-based learning approach is structured, sequential, cumulative and systematic. It emphasizes the alphabetic principle in the early stages of reading development, while during the more advanced stages, developing word analysis with strategies for chunking words into syllables, roots, prefixes, and suffixes.
- Reading and spelling multisensory activities are taught simultaneously and reinforce literacy development.
- *Nessy Learning*'s 100 sequential lessons begin with activities that develop phoneme/grapheme recognition then transition onto whole words and sentences.
- *Nessy Learning*'s program is diagnostic and prescriptive. It continuously monitors students' responses with reports that allow teachers to identify and analyze students' areas of difficulty and progress.

Overall, relevant research studies suggest that the Orton-Gillingham method results in improvement in word reading, word attack/decoding, spelling, and comprehension. Section III of this report examines key research studies that outline the program's ability for teaching reading to struggling readers in elementary school. These studies provide persuasive evidence to support their findings.

II. Program Overview

The Orton-Gillingham (O-G) Multisensory Structured Language Approach was developed in the 1930s by Samuel Torrey Orton, a neuropsychiatrist at Columbia University, and by Anna Gillingham, an educator and psychologist at the Teachers College at Columbia University. Orton is considered to be a pioneer in the developing principles of reading remediation. He believed that an instructional approach for reading should “capitalize on the students’ auditory competence by teaching them the phonetic equivalence of the printed letters and the process of blending sequences of such equivalents so that they might be able to produce for themselves the spoken form of the word from its graphic counterparts” (as cited in Ritchey & Goeke, 2006).

In 1960, Gillingham created the curriculum by which to teach the O-G approach. She required teachers to undergo 2 years of supervised teaching and academic work before they could become competent in this approach. Both Orton and Gillingham believed that by using a multi-faceted approach to comprehending reading and writing, the information would become more firmly implanted in the minds of students.

This broad method to teaching reading and spelling is considered first of its kind to implement the multisensory, visual/auditory, kinesthetic (VAK) approach to teaching students with dyslexia to read, as it targets students with language processing deficiencies. The O-G method may be adjusted for students at all reading levels, and may be administered during individual, small group or whole group instruction.

The O-G method teaches phonology and phonological awareness, sound-symbol association, syllable instruction, morphology, syntax and semantics. It is based on the belief that incorporating the following skills in the educational process has a positive impact on the students’ ability to learn how to read, write and spell:

- Studying sounds and how they work within the environment,
- Learning the sounds of the English language and their correspondence to letters that represent those sounds,
- Understanding morphemes (smallest units of meaning in language),
- Studying base words, roots, prefixes and suffixes,
- Understanding the principles that dictate the sequence and function of words to convey meaning (grammar, sentence variation, and mechanics of language), and
- Studying the aspects of language concerned with meaning.

Unlike other reading programs, the O-G method is not scripted or rigid and allows flexibility. It is taught in a simultaneously and multisensory manner. This approach is systematic and cumulative, following a logical order of language. Teachers of the O-G method engage all learners by presenting concepts in ways that visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile learners can grasp. They provide direct instruction and engage in diagnostic teaching, meaning they adjust their instruction according to results from continuous assessments of their students.

Furthermore, teachers provide synthetic and analytic instruction. They present parts of language

and teach how the parts work together, and present the “whole” and how it can be broken down into its components.

The Orton-Gillingham Institute for Multi-Sensory Education is committed to providing instruction of the highest quality through direct and individualized instruction thus increasing the children’s literacy skills. Their teacher professional development is systematic and sequential so that educators gain the skills needed to teach the foundations of language. Furthermore, the training incorporates the three learning pathways: auditory, kinesthetic and visual. The skills acquired by teachers during the professional development allow them to capitalize on an individual student’s dominant learning modality, while delivering instruction that strengthens the other learning pathways. This method can be implemented in large classroom settings, although small group and one-on-one instruction is highly recommended. It can be used for Response to Intervention (RtI) and supports the current reading program as an additional tool to be implemented during literacy instruction.

III. Review of Research

Overall, relevant research studies suggest that the Orton-Gillingham method results in improvement in word reading, word attack/decoding, spelling, and comprehension. Below are some key research studies that examine its ability for teaching reading to struggling readers in elementary school and provide persuasive evidence to support their findings.

In 1979, Litcher & Roberge used an experimental design to compare the effectiveness of the Orton-Gillingham approach to a controlled group of 1st graders below reading level. During a period of 3 years, 600 students were screened and 20 students were identified each year as “at-risk” for reading literacy. The students in the experimental group received reading instruction based on the O-G method for 3 hours each day for an entire school year. The students in the control group received instruction from the traditional basal reading series.

At the end of the school year, students were assessed using the Metropolitan Achievement Tests (MAT) and the Gates MacGinitie (GM) Reading Test. The students in the experimental group demonstrated an increase in word knowledge, word analysis, comprehension and total reading on the MAT. However, students in both the control and experimental groups showed an increased measure in the vocabulary and comprehension scores.

In 2002, Joshi et al. compared *Language Basics* (Orton-Gillingham) to the Houghton Mifflin reading program in first grade classrooms. Two classes were taught using the O-G method and 2 classes at a different school were taught using the Houghton Mifflin basal series. There were 32 1st graders in the control group and 24 in the experimental group. All participating students were assessed at the start of the school year to determine their initial levels of phonological awareness, decoding and reading comprehension. The assessments used were the comprehension subtest

from the Gates MacGinitie Reading Test (GMRT), the word attack subtest from the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test Revised (WRMT-T), and the Test of Phonological Awareness (TOPA). Teachers in the experimental group received 42 hours of O-G professional development, but all teachers (control and experimental) were observed delivering instruction once a week. Students in the experimental group received 50 minutes of daily instruction using the O-G methods for one school year.

At the end of the year, students were assessed using alternate test forms of the same assessments administered at the start of the research study. Significant gains in the experimental group were reported for all tested areas. Students in the control group also demonstrated improvements in comprehension measures, but not on phonological awareness or decoding.

The National Reading Panel's *Teaching Children to Read: An Evidenced-Based Assessment of Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction* (April 2000) supported the Orton-Gillingham direct systematic phonics instruction. The Panel listed the following facts to support their position:

- Meta-analysis indicates systematic phonics instruction enhances children's success in reading more than a program with little or no phonics.
- Systematic synthetic phonics instruction produces success and benefits students in grades Kindergarten through 6, as well as adults struggling with reading.
- Systematic synthetic phonics instruction has positive and significant effects on learning for disabled readers, on improving children's alphabetic knowledge, and on word reading skills.
- There is solid support that direct systematic phonics contributes far more in student reading growth than programs without phonics or system.
- Systematic phonics are far more effective than non-phonetic instruction in preventing reading problems in at risk students and for remediating disabled readers.
- Growth in word-reading skills enhanced by systematic phonics in Kindergarten and 1st grade as well as for older struggling readers is more effective than non-phonics instruction.
- Comprehension is enhanced as well when systematic phonics is used in instruction for younger students and reading disabled students.

The NRP found all the presented findings through a comprehensive, formal, evidence-based analysis of the research literature. Evidence-based facts clearly show that direct systematic phonics programs provide the most effective method of delivering an accurate foundation of phonological decoding for higher level reading skills. Therefore, the Orton-Gillingham multisensory language approach is a viable educational solution for struggling readers.

IV. Program Benefits

When the Orton-Gillingham program is implemented with fidelity, students benefit from a sequential, cumulative, multi-sensory approach that enhances the effectiveness of their current curriculum. Through this model, students are instructed by teachers who are well trained in language enrichment, multisensory grammar and writing, and developmental metacognitive skills. The O-G approach equips teachers with strategies appropriate for all tiers of the Response to Intervention (RtI) Model. They are able to use strategies to effectively intervene at the “at-risk” level and develop literate students who can read, write and spell.

Who benefits from the Orton-Gillingham Methodology? All students! This multisensory language approach is ideal for students whose parents do not read to them, for students who do not show awareness of sounds in reading, for children who have not been introduced to concepts of print or literacy activities at a young age, and for children that speak late, do not rhyme well, and lack word recognition skills. However, children who do not share these deficits will progress quickly through the program and will demonstrate increased academic achievement as well.

V. Conclusion

The Orton-Gillingham method is a powerful language intervention for children and adults with delayed or non-existent reading skills due to language-based processing disorders or disabilities such as dyslexia. The National Reading Panel Report (NRPR, 2000) supports the significance of offering classroom instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Therefore it endorses the O-G methods because of its multi-sensory applications that engage kinesthetic, auditory, and visual cues; its sequential and cumulative acquisition of alphabetic and phonemic principals; its practical, language-based applications embedded within a variety of language experiences; and its analytic and synthetic repetition with familiar bodies of learning that enable learners to make reasonable linguistic predictions about new language patterns.

There is a growing body of evidence supporting multisensory teaching. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) supports current research that found that when children’s instruction takes place in a structured, sequential, multisensory intervention environment, and by educators trained in phonemic awareness, significant gains in decoding skills are evident. Therefore, the Orton-Gillingham Language Approach is a solid, research-proven solution for students of all ages and abilities.

VI. Work Cited

"Academy of Orton-Gillingham." *Academy of Orton-Gillingham*. N.p., n.d. Web. 09 Feb. 2014.

Gillingham, A. & Stillman, B.W. (1997). *The Gillingham Manual: remedial training for students with specific disability in reading, spelling and penmanship*. (8th ed.). Cambridge, MA: Educators Publishing Service.

Henry, M. K. & Brickley, S. G. (Eds.). (1999). *Dyslexia: Samuel T. Orton and his legacy*. Baltimore: The International Dyslexia Association.

Joshi, R.M., Dahlgren, M., & Boulware- Gooden, R. (2002). Teaching reading in an inner city school through a multisensory approach. *Annals of Dyslexia*. 52, 229-242.

Litcher, J.H., & Roberge, L.P. (1979). First grade intervention for reading achievement of high risk children. *Bulletin of the Orton Society*. 24, 238- 244.