

# Florida Center for Reading Research

## Orton-Gillingham Approach

### What is the Orton-Gillingham Approach?

The *Orton-Gillingham Approach* to reading instruction is based on the work of Dr. Samuel T. Orton and was developed into a remedial program manual by Anna Gillingham and Bessie Stillman. It was first commercially published in 1946. Anna Gillingham designed the manual to be a resource and guide for instruction; it was not meant to be used by individuals without training in Orton-Gillingham methods. During Anna Gillingham's years of experience teaching and training others in her approach to instruction, she required them to undergo two years of supervised teaching and academic work before they were considered competent in this approach. The *Orton-Gillingham Approach* is considered the first of its kind to implement and popularize the multisensory, visual-auditory-kinesthetic (VAK) approach to teaching students with dyslexia to read. The *Orton-Gillingham* principles of instruction are identified by the International Dyslexia association (formerly the Orton Dyslexia Society) and listed in the manual as essential components to the *Orton-Gillingham Approach*: individualized, multisensory, alphabetic phonics, synthetic/analytic, systematic and logical, sequential, cumulative and integrated, cognitive, fluency, communication is paramount and emotionally sound (Gillingham & Stillman, 1997). Since the inception and refinement of the *Orton-Gillingham Approach* in the 1920s and 30s, many programs have been developed using these principles (Slingerland, Project Read, Recipe for Reading, Language!, The Writing Road to Reading, S.P.I.R.E., Dyslexia Training Program, Alphabetic Phonics, and the Wilson Reading System to name a few).



### What processes are in place in Orton-Gillingham?

The process one must undergo to obtain recognized training in the *Orton-Gillingham Approach* is lengthy and comprehensive. The Academy of Orton-Gillingham Practitioners and Educators was established in 1995 as a governing board to establish and maintain standards of instruction and certify individuals in the *Orton-Gillingham Approach* (J.C. Howell, personal communication, May 30, 2006). The Academy recognizes four levels of membership: Subscriber, Associate, Certified, and Fellow. Subscribers must complete an Academy approved course of at least 10 hours that introduces the *Orton-Gillingham Approach*, multisensory teaching, the phonology and structure of the English language, and the characteristics of dyslexia. Associate members are required to have a bachelor's degree and complete 100 hours of supervised practicum (teaching one-on-one under an Academy Fellow). In addition to the practicum they must complete 45 hours of course work in the Academy prescribed curriculum. Certified members are required to meet the criteria for Associate membership and complete an additional 200 hours of Orton-Gillingham teaching under the supervision of an Academy Fellow. They are also required to complete an additional 100 hours of course work deemed acceptable by the Academy in content and obtain letters of recommendation. Fellows of the Academy have met the criteria for Certified membership and are practitioners in Orton-Gillingham for at least 10 years along with continued education and active participation in conferences. Fellows are the only members judged by the Academy to be qualified to train and supervise others in the *Orton-Gillingham Approach*.

A daily lesson using the *Orton-Gillingham Approach* typically lasts between 45-60 minutes. It requires seven steps: (1) review of letters and sounds already learned, (2) introduction of new phonogram (symbol) and its sound, (3) lists of individual words for reading aloud, carefully selected to review previously learned associations, (4) dictation of new and previously learned sounds, (5) dictation of words using only those phonograms and phonemes already taught, (6) dictation of sentences using words made up of phonograms and phonemes previously taught, (7) oral reading from a text controlled for orthography. Although each lesson is paced and structured according to the needs of the individual, the lessons are not programmed (teacher's must create the lesson plan material within the structured steps).

The overall goal of the *Orton-Gillingham Approach* is to thoroughly train teachers and tutors to teach students with severe reading disabilities to read by explicitly and systematically breaking down the structure of the English language. It is diagnostic and prescriptive. This program touches on all five components of reading with focused instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics and fluency. Trainees of the Orton-Gillingham Approach are taught to use informal assessments and data collected from each lesson to drive instruction based on observable student need. By the design of Anna Gillingham, there are no set materials for the *Orton-Gillingham Approach*. A teacher's manual, phonogram cards, and a jewel case (phonetic word cards that contain spelling generalizations, etc.) are consistent components of the approach. It is with extensive training that trainees are equipped with the knowledge necessary to create student specific lessons. Over the years other practitioners have created packaged materials to assist in lesson plan development (see For More Information).

### Research Support for Orton-Gillingham



A search of the research literature for studies examining the efficacy of the *Orton-Gillingham Approach* did not identify any empirical studies of this approach implemented specifically as described in the *Orton-Gillingham* training materials. There are numerous studies of intervention programs such as Alphabetic Phonics, Project Read, or the Wilson Reading System, that were derived from the general *Orton-Gillingham Approach* and implement many of its principles. However, since these programs all contain features unique to their own program and not shared by other *Orton-Gillingham* derived programs, they cannot be included in this review of research. We must conclude that, although the *Orton-Gillingham Approach* contains many of the characteristics of effective intervention programs that have been identified in scientifically based research on reading, there are no studies available at present to provide an estimate of its impact on the reading growth of young children.

### Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths of *Orton-Gillingham*:

- Comprehensive and thorough training of practitioners to control for fidelity of implementation.
- Explicit and systematic instruction for students with severe reading disabilities.
- Clearly delineated scope and sequence.

Weaknesses of *Orton-Gillingham*:

- Teacher intensive daily planning for creating student specific lessons.

### Which Florida districts have implemented Orton-Gillingham?

Currently there are no recognized schools implementing the *Orton-Gillingham Approach* in Florida. The closest school with Orton-Gillingham accreditation is in Georgia:

The Schenck School  
 282 Mt. Paran Rd., N.W.  
 Atlanta, Georgia 30327  
 Contact: Rosalie Davis, Fellow/AOGPE  
 Ph.: 404- 252-2591  
<http://www.schenck.org/>

### For More Information

<http://www.ortonacademy.org>

The Academy of Orton-Gillingham Practitioners and Educators

<http://www.epsbooks.com/dynamic/catalog/series.asp?subject=16S&subjectdesc=Dyslexia+Materials+&series=200M>

The Gillingham Manual, Phonics and Word Cards and Online Introductory Orton-Gillingham Training

<http://www.interdys.org>

The International Dyslexia Association

### References

Gillingham, A. & Stillman, B. W. (1997). *The gillingham manual: Remedial training for students with specific disability in reading, spelling, and penmanship*. (8<sup>th</sup> 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.

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Important Note: FCRR Reports are prepared in response to requests from Florida school districts for review of specific reading programs. The reports are intended to be a source of information about programs that will help teachers, principals, and district personnel in their choice of materials that can be used by skilled teachers to provide effective instruction. Whether or not a program has been reviewed does **not** constitute endorsement or lack of endorsement by the FCRR. The programs for which reports are available do not constitute an "approved" or "required" list, since many potentially useful programs have not yet been reviewed. For an overview of the conditions under which these reports were prepared, please read the information found here:

<http://www.fcrr.org/FCRRReports/index.htm>

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