Multisensory Teaching Approach for Reading, Spelling, and Handwriting, Orton-Gillingham Based Curriculum, in a Public School Setting

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This paper includes an overview of curriculum information and the basic techniques of a multisensory approach for teaching alphabet and dictionary skills, reading, spelling, and cursive handwriting. It also reports the results of a four-year study of reading and spelling in both remedial and nonremedial classes in a public school. The California Achievement Test (CAT) scores in reading and spelling for students in both remedial and nonremedial classes improved over baseline scores following this multisensory approach. Additionally, there was a tendency for the CAT mean scores to increase corresponding to the number of years students had been taught by the multisensory program.

The relationship of perception and/or language to reading, spelling, and handwriting achievement has been investigated extensively (Belmont and Birch 1965; Bruner 1957; Critchley 1964, 1970; Cruickshank 1966; Hermann 1959; Kephart 1960; Kirk 1963, 1968; Money 1962; Myklebust and Johnson 1967; Orton 1928, 1929, 1932, 1937; Rappaport 1969; Strauss and Lehtinen 1947; Thompson 1966; Werner and Strauss 1939, 1940). Some theorists have postulated that various kinds of perceptual training prerequisite to educational instruction would improve an individual's ability to master academic skills of reading, spelling, and handwriting (Barsch 1967; Frostig and Maslow 1969; Kephart 1960; Rappaport 1969). Other researchers also have considered the role of
language as related to reading, spelling, and handwriting skills (de Hirsch, Jansky, and Langford 1966; Gough and Hillinger 1980; Gough and Tunmer 1986; Kirk and Bateman 1962; Liberman 1982; Liberman and Rubin 1983; Liberman and Shankweiler 1985; Mann 1984; Myklebust and Johnson 1967; Orton 1928, 1929, 1932, 1937). Orton (1929) recognized that perception played a role in the ability to master written language skills; however, he suggested that the answer to remediation lay in developing different instructional methods for teaching reading, spelling, and handwriting skills. Both Monroe (1932) and Gillingham (1936), working with Orton, developed phonic remedial procedures for teaching dyslexic children. Gillingham and Stillman (1956) published a manual recommending teaching methods and multisensory techniques based on Orton's theories and suggestions. For additional background information on Orton's theories concerning language difficulties, consult Rawson (1974).

During 1965 to 1975, Alphabets Phonics (AP), a curriculum for teaching reading, spelling, and cursive handwriting was developed by the staff of the Texas Scottish Rite Hospital Language Laboratory in Dallas, Texas (Waites and Cox 1969). Beginning with the Orton-Gillingham-Stillman system of remedial language training, an interdisciplinary staff of educators, physicians, psychologists, speech therapists, occupational therapists, and physical therapists worked daily with approximately 100 children, expanding the Orton-Gillingham-Stillman system to include the teachings of Bruner, Piaget, Fernald, Montessori, Carroll, Bloom, and others (Cox 1984). This refinement, structuring, and expansion of the original system made it possible to work with small homogeneous groups of students, rather than on an individual basis, as Gillingham recommended. Beginning in 1977, the AP materials and techniques were used for teaching one remedial class in a small public school district in Northeast Texas. Because of the progress made by the students in this class, in 1978 a group of regular classroom teachers became interested in using AP materials and techniques for all students in their regular classrooms. Additional materials, called the Multisensory Teaching Approach for Reading, Spelling, and Handwriting (MTARSH) Program and the Classroom Alphabetic Phonics (CAP) alphabet and dictionary skills, were developed for this purpose. The development of these materials made it possible to use the same precise Orton-Gillingham-Stillman and AP techniques and materials with large homogeneous groups of children as well as with small homogeneous groups of dyslexic and learning-disabled students. This article reports the results of an experimental project employing the...