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This critical review examines the ability of the Orton Gillingham (OG) approach for teaching reading skills to poor readers in elementary school. A literature search was conducted and study designs included seven quasi-experimental studies and one systematic review. Findings indicate positive results for word reading, word attack/decoding, spelling and comprehension.

Recent estimates of reading disabilities in the United States range from 5-12% (Monsen, 2004). It has long been recognized that when classroom instruction is not effective or is insufficient, a high percentage of school-age students do not acquire literacy skills (Carroll, 1963). Further, poor instruction in early elementary years has a more direct impact on reading than in the later years and therefore, poor readers need high quality reading intervention in the early year of school (Joshi et al., 2002)

Samuel Orton, considered a pioneer in the developing principles of reading remediation beginning in the 1920s, posited that an instructional approach for reading should “attempt to capitalize on their 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). Anna

students made up the treatment group. All students had standard covariates (e.g., SES, age). Children with below average IQ,

techniques and description of procedures. This study provides evidence that the OG approach proved to be beneficial for improving phonological processing, but not significantly more so than the analytic phonics group.

Oakland et al. (1998) used a quasi-experimental design to compare effectiveness of the Alphabetic Phonics (OG) instruction to a control group.

description of procedures. This study provides persuasive evidence that the OG approach proved to be beneficial for improving phonemic awareness and word attack.

One study by Westrich-Bond (1993) found no statistical significant differences on any measures between the OG approach to teaching reading and the control intervention approach.

Westrich-Bond (1993) used a quasi-experimental design to compare the effectiveness of the OG instruction for teaching reading to the basal reading instruction to students, ages 6-12 with learning disabilities that were in a special classroom. Four groups 1) resource room with OG 2) resource room with basal reading 3) self-contained room and OG and 4) self-contained room and basal reading received reading instruction for four sessions a week. The subtests Word Identification and Word Attack from the

were administered pre and post. Significant changes in scores were found for both groups, but one was not significantly better than the other. This article was not published and methods of analysis are not available for the systematic review. However, it was noted that word identification improved more in the resource room condition and the word attack improved more in the self-contained room condition. A strength of this study is the two conditions to teaching the approaches.

Overall, the critical appraisal of relevant research material suggests that the OG approach to teaching reading results in improvement in word reading,

word attack/decoding, spelling and comprehension in various populations and settings. For those beginning to read and those in elementary school, positive results were seen in general education classrooms and clinical settings.

However, all reading measures were not shown to improve with the OG approach, not all positive effects were in favour of the OG approach, or solely the OG approach, and some studies did not find statistically significant improvement for either instructional approach. For example, the study by Westrich-Bond (1993) determined that neither instructional approach showed significant differences; whereas a study by Litcher & Roberge (1979) found that the OG approach for teaching reading had significantly positive effects for all measures.

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instructional needs, who is capable of instructing and research examining the overall effectiveness of the OG approach is warranted.

The current evidence examining the OG approach to teaching reading is inadequate. There is variability in the findings across the studies examined in this critical review, making it unclear if this approach is beneficial and/or significantly more beneficial than other approaches to teaching reading. The differences in the results between studies may be due to differing populations, ages, intervention set-up, assessment measures, and screening procedures. The fact that it takes training to implement the OG instructional approach to teaching reading may make it prove difficult to see consistent results due to teacher variability.

In application to the field of Speech-Language Pathology (SLP) research may be done to examine effectiveness of the SLP utilizing the OG approach in individual or group therapy sessions. Research is still needed to determine who would be best served with the OG instructional approach, at what time/age and in which setting in order to improve reading skills.

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