Davis Dyslexia

Website / for more information see:

http://www.dyslexia.com/program.htm

http://www.davisdyslexia.co.nz/

What claims does the company make / what does the programme target?

Ron Davis, the creator of Davis Dyslexia, claims that dyslexia is caused by a gifted ability that involves "utilising the brain to alter and create perceptions". In his book, Davis also claims that dyslexics think mainly in pictures (nonverbal conceptualisation), with little to no internal monologue, think and perceive multi-dimensionally, and experience thought as reality. The dyslexic symptoms occur as nonverbal conceptualisation cannot be used to understand certain words, as the individual has no image for it (e.g. word "the"), and this leads to confusion/disorientation. The Davis Programme claims to teach the students how to recognise and control the mental state that leads to this confusion, through Orientation Counselling, and gives them the ability to think about problem words, numbers etc. nonverbally (by forming a mental image using the clay modelling methods), thereby preventing the disorientation.

In addition to the Davis programme for reading and writing, there are also Davis programmes aimed at targeting dyscalculia (Maths Mastery), ADHD (Attention Mastery) and reading for younger children (Davis Reading Programme for Young Learners). Davis Dyslexia claims that younger children exposed to the latter Davis programme are highly unlikely to develop a learning difficulty, are significantly more likely to qualify for gifted programme referrals and will have very high levels of basic word recognition for their age.

According to the website, the Davis programme is suitable primarily for children 8 years or over and adults of any age. Davis' book suggests that symbol mastery methods can be used for children under the age of 8.

Claims to bring about improvement in spelling, reading, handwriting as well as self-esteem and confidence. The website also claims that the programme has a 97% success rate.

What it involves:

The Davis Correction programme is roughly a 30 hour programme, generally completed within a period of one week. Each participant works individually with a licensed Davis facilitator. The New Zealand website also notes that the client can come back for up to 3 follow up reviews when needed.

More details on the methods in the Davis correction programme can be found in Ron Davis' book, *The Gift of Dyslexia*.

<u>Davis Perceptual Ability Assessment:</u>

Involves imaging a piece of cake (or cheese — something with a distinct shape) from different locations/perspectives. Davis says that this action involves "shifting the mind's eye". According to Davis, this assessment is used to determine whether a person has the ability to easily "move their mind's eye around".

Orientation Counselling:

The purpose of orientation counselling is to train the participant to turn disorientation (i.e. a multidimensional way of thinking/perceiving that enables the dyslexic to better understand the world, but also brings about dyslexic symptoms) on and off. When disorientation is turned off, the individual is said to have an accurate, consistent perception of the environment and this eliminates dyslexic symptoms. Orientation counselling primarily involves mental imagery to find the "orientation point" and "anchoring it in place" — which Davis claims turns disorientation off. The participant is then trained to control turning disorientation on and off and shifting back to orientation if something happens (e.g. a distraction) that causes disorientation. For more details, see *The Gift of Dyslexia*.

Release and Review:

This is for when the individual gets headaches from "holding" (according to Davis, holding is when the individual is attempting to move his/her "mind's eye" while simultaneously trying to prevent it from moving).

Release procedure: the participant makes a loose fist, then thinks "open hand" but instead makes the fist tighter. This is done twice more, each time making the fist even tighter. Then the participant releases the clenched fist "without a thought". Participant is told to be aware of the feeling of "release" going through the arm, hand and fingertips and that their mind's eye can have that feeling by "simply wanting to".

Orientation review: Davis claims that the "orientation point" established during initial orientation counselling may occasionally move, so a review is done to put it back in its original place. First the student identifies where their orientation point is, then adjusts their finger to where it should be.

Fine Tuning:

This is done to find the "optimum orientation point". According to Davis, the participant knows when this is found as they "will be perfectly balanced" and will "experience a profound sense of wellbeing". Fine tuning involves balancing on one foot and moving the mind around until the participant feels that it is on a point where their body is in perfect balance, then "anchoring" the mind's eye at this point. Fine tuning is done daily until the orientation point is reliably at its optimum point.

Koosh Ball Therapy:

According to Davis, this exercise is supposed to address coordination and dyspraxia problems. The facilitator stands 6-10 feet away from participant and checks that they are "on point". Once "oriented", the participant balances on one foot and has to catch 2 Koosh balls, one in either hand. The facilitator progresses from throwing the balls in sequence, to throwing them simultaneously, to throwing them only to one side of the body, depending on how easily student is able to catch the balls while maintaining balance.

Symbol Mastery:

This involves a multidimensional approach to learning trigger symbols and words, as participants develop and understanding of what the symbol/word looks like (spelling), sounds like (pronunciation) and what it means (picture).

- Uppercase and lowercase letters: the participant makes the letters out of clay and has them positioned and sequenced in the correct order. If mistakes are found, participant is told to make comparisons with examples, so that they can realise their mistakes and correct them. Participant then touches and says the letter of each alphabet in forward and backward order, looking when needed, until they are able to do so without looking. Facilitator then calls out a letter and participant must select the appropriate clay letter and say what letters follow and precede the target the letter. Symbol mastery is achieved when all exercises can be completed easily. The exercises starts with uppercase letters.

  Additional exercises: finding letters in surroundings, writing the letters and noticing the different print styles and typefaces.

  • Punctuation symbols: the facilitator goes over the simple definition of each symbol with participant. The participant then makes the symbol with clay, writes the name of the symbol on a piece of paper, and places the clay form of the symbol in proper relation to the written form. The facilitator points out punctuation marks in text, and has the student do the same. The facilitator also goes over uses of the mark and has the student provide verbal and written examples of how each mark is used. They should also ensure that student knows how to pronounce the name of each symbol.
- Words: the participant looks up the word in a dictionary and learns how to pronounce it. The first definition of the word is read, and the participant makes up sentences/phrases with that particular definition. A clay model of the concept described by that definition and clay letters of the word are then made, allowing the participant to form a mental picture of what has been created. The participant then says the word and its definition aloud, and they may also touch and say the letters of the word or write the word if they wish. Davis recommends that when going through words on a list, the first definition of all words should be mastered before progressing through the list again and mastering additional definitions.
- Mastery of the pronunciation key in a dictionary, print styles and typefaces can also be achieved if needed. See *The Gift of Dyslexia* for more details.

Spell Reading:

Starting at a grade lower than what the child is at, the participant makes a word using clay. Then, the participant must spell and read each word. The aim to is to help participants recognise letters and words and train left-to-right reading

Sweep-Sweep-Spell:

The facilitator covers words in a line with paper, only revealing one word at a time. The participant must try to read each word. A word may be swept twice and if the participant still cannot read the word, then it has to be spelled and pronounced. The aim is recognition and training left-to-right reading.

Picture-at-Punctuation:

The participant reads a text up to punctuation and then explains what they have read. They are asked to form a picture in their mind of what they have read.

Orientation Counselling and Symbol Mastery are the key exercises in the programme. Davis recommends starting off with Orientation Counselling, followed by a reading exercise from

Spell Reading to detect and correct disorientations. Release procedures are done when needed. Basic Symbol Mastery is done after Orientation Counselling, followed by Orientation Review and then Fine Tuning before proceeding. Davis also recommends alternating Symbol Mastery with the three aforementioned reading exercises (spell reading, sweep-sweep-spell and picture-at-punctuation). Following programme completion, the participant is advised to continue with Koosh ball therapy, the reading exercises and symbol mastery with clay.

Davis Maths Mastery:

Like with Dyslexia Correction, Orientation Counselling is also provided under the Maths Mastery programme. Clay modelling is also used for Symbol Mastery, but with a focus on numbers and mathematical symbols. It is unclear whether additional mathematical exercises are practised with the participants. According to the NZ Davis website, the programme usually takes roughly 5 to 8 days to complete, though less time may be required if the participant has already complete Dyslexia Correction.

Davis Attention Mastery:

Orientation Counselling is also provided within this programme. Additionally, the programme also involves Davis Concept Mastery, where clay is used to enable the individual to understand missing or misunderstood life concepts. Davis proposes that understanding these concepts allows the individual to better understand situations, apply the concepts to their daily life and improve behavioural choices. These concepts typically include: change, consequence, cause/effect, before/after, time, sequence, order vs disorder.

Davis Reading Programme for Young Learners:

This programme is aimed at children aged 5 to 7 years, and involves assistance from a facilitator as well as a parent/family member. It is based on the Davis Dyslexia Correction programme, but does not involve Orientation Counselling.

Evidence for efficacy:

Few peer reviewed articles have been published on the Davis Dyslexia programme, most of which are case studies. Additionally, several of these studies have been published in a non-English language, therefore these could not be reviewed. There were no peer-reviewed articles evaluating the efficacy of other Davis programmes (i.e. Davis Maths Mastery, Davis Attention Mastery, Davis Reading Programme for Younger Learners).

Pfeiffer et al. (2001):

Davis learning strategies were integrated into the reading programmes of 48 first grade children from 3 pilot classrooms. 48 students from control classrooms also followed the same reading programme as the pilot children, but without the use of any Davis learning strategies.

The Davis learning strategies involved training "focusing skills" (it is unclear whether this is like the Orientation Counselling) and Symbol Mastery.

Children were tested word recognition of 100 basic core words prior to training and following training at the end of the school year. Mann-Whitney U test results revealed that students in the pilot classrooms scored significantly higher on the control group for their word recognition. The study also notes that the pilot classrooms had no special education referrals made 2 years after Davis training, but did have greater gifted referrals made than would be expected in a typical high school population.

Limitations: did not look at whether other reading or language skills improved; although long term data was collected on special education and gifted referrals, no long term measures were taken on reading and language skills. As such, we cannot be sure whether the Davis learning strategies produced any lasting effects. The authors also do not discuss the special education and gifted referrals for the control classroom; unclear whether there were any pre-training differences between the pilot and control students.

van Staden, Tolmie, & Badenhorst, 2009:

This study aimed to address the impairments of 10-14 year old dyslexics through a community-based research project. Specifically, 8 Honours students in support teaching developed and implemented a literacy programme for intermediate dyslexics that were based on Ron Davis' methods (Orientation Counselling and Symbol Mastery were included in the intervention programme). The experimental group (n = 18) received individual support from the Honours students once a week for 30 mins over a period of 9 months. The control group (n = 18) received individual support from their respective support teaching educators, also once a week for 30 mins over 9 months. The training for the control group focused primarily on the development of literacy skills using phonological methods.

Mann-Whitney U tests revealed that there were no significant differences between the experimental and control groups prior to training. However, following intervention, there were significant differences between the two groups on word recognition and spelling scores: the experimental group showed a significant improvement on both measures, whereas there was no change for the control group. Qualitative interviews also revealed that students showed improved concentration, better self-concepts and a reduction in speech and behaviour-related problems.

Limitations: sample size; did not provide much detail on the control group's intervention, just that it focused on phonological processing.

Ambrose & Cheong, 2011:

This study specifically looked at the effects of Davis' clay modelling methods with symbol mastery on the reading behaviours of three 13 year old dyslexic children. The programme was conducted for a total of 20 sessions, each approximately 75 mins, spanned over the course of 8 weeks. Sessions targeted symbol mastery of uppercase and lowercase letters, punctuation marks and words. Spell-Reading, Sweep-Sweep-Spell and Picture-at-Punctuation exercises were also used. The children were used as their own controls, with symbol mastery training used on one piece of text (Text 1) and no intervention administered for the other set of text (Text 2).

Results were presented in a case study-type format for each participant, thus no statistical tests were conducted. All participants were able to read Text 1 fluently, were able to spell words from Text 1 correctly, were more attentive in class and showed increased self-

confidence (the latter two results were indicated by teacher reports). However, students still struggled with reading and spelling words from Text 2, suggesting that the improvements with Text 1 were due to the symbol mastery methods.

Limitations: sample size (and consequently lack of statistical analyses); subjective measures were used; no alternative treatment group and participants were used as their own controls;

Amsberry, McLaughlin, Derby, & Waco, 2012:

This was a case study, in which a 9 year old boy with significant learning disability underwent Symbol Mastery with different sets of words to address his spelling deficits. After symbol mastery for a set was completed, the participant was tested on spelling.

Results showed that spelling on the sets of words was low prior to training, but increased to 90% correct following training.

Limitations: case study; did not look at whether training benefits generalised to other language and reading skills; possible that repetition effects may have influenced results.

Evidence against efficacy:

There is evidence to suggest that visual images, e.g. drawings, can help recall (de la Iglesia, Buceta & Campos, 2005), therefore it is possible that clay modelling helps dyslexic children learn and remember words that they may struggle with. However, there is no evidence to suggest that dyslexics experience "disorientation" as Davis defines it or that they have a "mind's eye" that can be moved around to alter dyslexic symptoms. Davis also makes several claims about the abilities and experiences that dyslexics may have and what may underlie these experience, but fails to support these claims with evidence.

The limited number of peer-reviewed articles evaluating Davis Dyslexia generally have not focused on whether participating in the Davis programme resulted in improvements in more general reading/spelling abilities nor have studies compared Davis to alternative interventions (aside from van Staden et al., 2009). Additionally, several of these studies are case studies, and so there is a dearth of statistically significant results.

In sum, there is a lack of theoretical and high quality empirical evidence to support the Davis programme.

Price:

Between $2500 - $3000.

References:

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