

## *The Learning Key*

### *The Slingerland Approach, as used in New Zealand by The Learning Key*

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

On the Slingerland Institute's (n.d.-a) website, it claims that:

- (1) The intervention can be preventative if students with difficulties are identified before normal reading instruction takes place.
- (2) However, there are considerable individual differences in dyslexia. It is therefore difficult to predict the rate and degree of success of Slingerland instruction. Some students may show considerable improvement and become overall very comfortable with reading and writing; others might improve in some areas but still show deficits in others.
- (3) Factors that can influence the rate and degree of success include: severity of dyslexia pre-intervention; age of identification; motivation; individual teacher quality.

#### **Evidence for efficacy:**

Encouragingly, the Slingerland Approach systematically and explicitly (although not exclusively) targets phonetic rules, difficulty with which is generally thought to be the underlying cause of dyslexia (Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2005). Meta-analysis has revealed systematic phonics instruction helps students to learn to read, is more effective than whole language approaches, and is more effective if begun early (Ehri, Nunes, Stahl, & Willows, 2001).

However, we could access only one study in a peer-reviewed journal that directly investigated its use:

#### *Lovitt & DeMier (1984):*

- Compared the efficacy of two competing reading remediation programmes — the Slingerland and Sullivan (a more individualised programme) approaches in learning disabled children.
- The first group ( $n = 7$ ) received Slingerland instruction. The second ( $n = 7$ ) received Sullivan instruction.
- The researchers used ten before and after measures:
  - the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT)
  - the Slingerland Screening Test (SST)
  - Lippincott measures:
    - reading passages orally
    - saying facts from the passages
    - answering comprehension questions from the passages
    - reading word lists
  - Ginn 360 passages
  - Phonics measures – students had to say sounds from a sheet of written:
    - letters
    - consonant blends

- consonant vowel consonant (CVC) words
- Improvements were noted on most measures for both groups. On some measures (notably in terms of correct response rates, and the SST generally), the Slingerland group showed greater improvements. On others (notably in terms of a reduction in incorrect responses, and the MAT generally), the Sullivan group improved more.
- Authors concluded both methods equally effective.

Limitations: no (reported) significance tests; no control group; group assignment not fully random.

The Slingerland Institute (n.d.-b) mentions a number of further studies in its document 'Slingerland Research', but generally seem to be unpublished dissertations/theses. A full reference list is unfortunately not provided, so it is difficult to access and assess many of these.

### **Evidence against efficacy:**

There is a general lack of research into the Slingerland method. The Slingerland Institute (n.d.-c, para. 3) does claim that "[c]urrent Slingerland research projects are in process and results will be forthcoming". There are, however, other studies investigating the efficacy of Orton-Gillingham methods more generally — see Orton-Gillingham's section in this report.

### **Price:**

Varies. Costs differ first depending on whether a parent is seeking individual tutoring, or whether a school is looking to train its teachers in the Slingerland Approach.

Where a parent is seeking individual tutoring, the Slingerland Institute recommends at least 2 sessions per week.

Where a school is looking to train its teachers in the Slingerland Approach, it must decide whether it wants them to qualify as "Slingerland Trained" or to progress to being fully "Certified Slingerland" teachers. A Slingerland Trained teacher is one who has completed at least one comprehensive course of 133 hours of instruction that includes a practicum. The requirements for becoming a Certified Slingerland teacher are more stringent, and include:

- completing the Introductory and Second Level Comprehensive Courses;
  - requires 266 hours of coursework, including 60 hours of practicum
  - requires studying "the history and etiology of dyslexia, comprehensive instruction in the system and structure of the English language (morphology and phonology), the science of the reading brain, vocabulary, assessment and specific Slingerland techniques in the development of daily lessons".
- holding a Bachelor's Degree or higher;
- 2 years of experience using the Slingerland Approach; and
- holding current membership with the Slingerland Institute.

### **What it involves:**

The Slingerland Approach is an adaptation of the Orton-Gillingham method which can be used in classroom situations, although can also be used in individual tutoring situations (Brigs & Clark, 1997). Lessons are multisensory, incorporating auditory, visual, and kinaesthetic elements. The programme focuses on phonics, and includes instruction in:

- the alphabetic principle (the fact there is a relationship between alphabet letters and spoken sounds);
- blending letters to read written words and spell words;
- suffixes, prefixes, and irregular phonetic rules; and
- vocabulary.

Instruction begins with a single unit and becomes more complex. Exercises may involve naming written letters, saying their sounds, drawing letters/suffixes/prefixes/phonemes/words in the air with fingers and/or writing these down, finger-tapping syllables, and tracing letters in trays of sand. Spelling from dictation is also used. Students generally undergo Slingerland teaching for two years.

Videos of Slingerland instruction in progress can be viewed at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQiQ71wepJg> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FDZtKVsoFgc>

### **References:**

- Briggs, K. L., & Clark, C. (1997). *Reading Programs for Students in the Lower Elementary Grades: What Does the Research Say?* Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED420046.pdf>.
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- Shaywitz, S. E., & Shaywitz, B. A. (2005). Dyslexia (specific reading disability). *Biological Psychiatry, 57*(11), 1301-1309.
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- Slingerland Institute. (n.d.-c). *Research*. Retrieved from <http://slingerland.org/Administrators/Research>.

### **Website / for more information see:**

<http://www.thelearningkey.org/>

<http://slingerland.org/>