

24th October 2009

The Clerk
Science and Technology Committee House of Commons
7 Millbank
London SW1P 3JA

Dear Sir,

Enclosed is my submission to the science and technology committee in response to their call for submissions: EVIDENCE CHECK: LITERACY INTERVENTIONS.

My submission covers the following points.

1. In making this submission I wish to draw the attention of the committee to the groundbreaking and seminal work into the teaching of literacy skills to dyslexics by the late Anna Gillingham. Anna Gillingham published her methods in the 50s and 60s.
2. I suggest that Anna Gillingham's remedial method not only is the gold standard for teaching dyslexics, but also provides the knowledge that cuts through the turf wars which have so bedevilled literacy teaching in this country, not only for dyslexics, but everyone.
3. I suggest that newspapers combined with TV and/or the Internet using U Tube can, at a profit to themselves and at no cost to the taxpayer, run a literacy course based on Gillingham for the benefit not just of our schoolchildren and our illiterate adults, but also our teachers.

I first became aware of dyslexia in 1987. As a professional musician I immediately recognized from my own experience both as a pupil and when teaching, that Anna Gillingham's methods worked. Since those days I've involved myself in the world of dyslexia, for instance as a member

of the British Dyslexia Association: Music and Dyslexia Committee. I've contributed chapters to two books on music and dyslexia, and a chapter to one book on stress and dyslexia.

I hope the committee will recommend applying dyslexic teaching methods to the teaching of all children. I note that Orton/Gillingham teaching methods are well proven over a long period of time - often in a hostile climate. My expectation is that if Orton/ Gillingham teaching methods are applied then 96% success across the complete range of pupils is to be expected. Further I expect success to be evident immediately from the first lesson onwards.

Worried parents might well hear after the first lesson as my wife did, 'It's all right Mummy, Grammy can help me.' This was what my son said after his first lesson from his grandmother.

The bottom line is that once I knew what worked, and why, I was unable as a parent to deny my children that teaching. Ever since I've done all I can to encourage others to take advantage of this knowledge. I suggest at every opportunity that once it is realised that so called dyslexic teaching methods work for everyone, to say or think differently is as difficult as calling black white or white black.

I am most grateful to the committee for looking into this subject.

Yours sincerely

Michael Lea

Submission to Science and Technology Committee by Michael Lea

23rd October 2009

INQUIRY EVIDENCE CHECK: LITERACY INTERVENTIONS

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4. **Introduction and definition.**
5. Back in 1925 Dr Samuel Orton, the American neurologist set out an outline for research into dyslexia. He postulated that dyslexia had a neurological basis. Only now with modern technology are his theories being proved. As well as outlining research goals Dr Samuel Orton commissioned and encouraged Anna Gillingham to research and publish a remedial method for teaching literacy skills that worked for dyslexics.
6. In a paper published in 1929, ‘the “sight reading” method of teaching reading as a source of reading disability’, Dr Samuel Orton looked for reasons why in one Ohio school district there were a number of children who failed to learn literacy skills while another Ohio school district was more successful in teaching literacy skills. It seems to me now that dyslexia is the result of inappropriate teaching.

7. More recently in 1990 Lieberman and Lieberman published in America a paper ‘whole language vs code emphasis: underlying assumptions and their implications for reading instruction.’ This paper analysed the educational theories of Professor Goodman. Professor Goodman’s theories are known as the whole language teaching. At best Lieberman and Lieberman predicted a failure rate of around 25% using the whole language theory.
8. While Professor Goodman’s whole language theory has been discredited in recent years, the practices enshrined in the method continue in many of our schools. The result is a national failure rate remarkably similar to Lieberman and Lieberman’s predictions
9. As far as **defining dyslexia** is concerned numerous attempts have been made to define dyslexia. For myself I await neurological scanning advances in the understanding of dyslexia and associated brain patterns for a definition. In the meantime it seems to me that whether 20 to 30% of our population is dyslexic, or 5% of our population is dyslexic, or none at all, everyone can benefit from Anna Gillingham’s insights into how to teach literacy skills.
10. **Gillingham** is little known in this country at first-hand. Back in the 50s when Gillingham was invited to visit the UK, instead of coming herself, she sent her assistant Sally Childs. Sally Childs took the opportunity of coming here to develop her own system based on Gillingham, but not Gillingham itself. A number of methods resulted, all of which work to a degree. For instance Hickey, Brand, Miles, Hornsby and the more recent methods the committee is looking into all owe something more or less to Gillingham - sometimes without direct knowledge of Gillingham..
11. I recommend studying Gillingham editions published during her lifetime because, sadly, it seems that recent ‘modernised’ editions of Gillingham’s method as published by Educators Publishing Service, have failed to understand fully Gillingham’s insights. Put bluntly perhaps, but the truth.

12. In any discussion of teaching methods, words such as "phonics" and "multisensory" need clarification. I note that many opposing and contradictory teaching methods have laid claim to these words.
13. **Phonics** in this country means all too often, teaching the sound of the letters not the names. In contrast phonics in Gillingham, perhaps best called phonetics, means teaching 'A Apple a', where 'A' is the name of the letter, 'Apple' is an example of the letter, and 'a' the sound of the letter. Teaching the entire alphabet, the name of a letter, together with an example, and the sound, is the basic building block on which Gillingham proceeds to build step-by-step until the pupil is fully literate in reading, writing and spelling.
14. **Multisensory** teaching involves the pupil using all their senses to reinforce each other: for instance the pupil sounds out loud each letter as the pupil themself writes. I note in passing that the Victorians used chalk and slates, dip pens and inkwells - scratchy multisensory writing materials indeed.
15. It seems to me, with the possibility that **swine flu** will close our schools in the near future, that there is an opportunity to prepare for this eventuality **by producing TV/Internet programs to enable pupils to learn from home**. With these TV programmes available for access in every home, everyone, parents and children, will be able to see for themselves how literacy is being taught - or not taught.
16. I suggest that if these TV programmes in teaching literacy are based on Gillingham then they will work for everyone. There is good news here for, whether swine flu closes our school or not, teachers can teach themselves using these TV programmes. I note here that all teachers need to do is to stay just ahead of their pupils.
17. Even better I am suggesting that **a newspaper, such as the Sunday Times, can run a weekly series showing how literacy can be taught effectively step-by-step**, one week at the time, with success building on success. Given the need to buy basic teaching materials, flashcards and the like, in order to teach the Gillingham way, any newspaper running this literacy programme is bound to increase its circulation.

18. I am suggesting there are things **to be done now by our existing cadre of teachers.** (Even without resorting to slates and dip pens). I am suggesting that, even without the spur of swine flu, our teachers can teach themselves and our children simultaneously. All that is needed is guidance, guidance that the Sunday Times, or another newspaper, can provide at its own expense and profit. **Success will be an immediate and the spur to further success.**

Michael Lea

23rd October 2009