

The Davis Dyslexia Program

Toni Hopper

Statement of the Problem

The acquisition of effective reading skills is fundamental to achieving success in school and later life. Unfortunately, for some children becoming a skilled reader proves to be a challenge. There are many programs purporting to help children with reading difficulty or dyslexia to become skilled readers. Some programs are based on strong independent research while others appear to have little independent research to back their claims. We do know that phonological disability is a frequent cause of children's reading disabilities but that visual problems are not usually responsible for reading problems.

Proposed Solution/ Intervention

The Davis Dyslexia Program claims to address the root cause of Dyslexia. Davis theorises that those with dyslexia are picture thinkers who suffer visual (perceptual) disorientations when looking at print and have difficulty with symbols such as letters or numerals. The Davis Program aims to control perceptual disorientation and eliminate the causes for this disorientation. It is claimed that by treating dyslexia, a range of other learning problems such as: dysgraphia, dyscalculia, ADD, auditory perception deficits, motor co-ordination difficulties will also be treated. The program is typically 30 hours, one-on-one, spread over 5 days. At the completion of the program a student is given materials to enable them to continue the Symbol Mastery at home. The program is said to be suitable for children aged 8 and over.

The theoretical rationale – how does it work?

The Davis program is a “visual, kinaesthetic, cognitive system for teaching basic reading and writing skills to dyslexic learners, by using their creativity”. The Davis Dyslexia correction program includes two components.

Davis Orientation Counselling teaches the student to turn off the thought processes which can cause the misperceptions. This is followed by Davis Symbol Mastery in which the student makes three-dimensional clay models of the alphabet, numerals and punctuation marks. The student then models in clay a three dimensional representation of abstract “trigger” words such as ‘and’ or ‘it’ which do not have a mental picture, as well as punctuation marks.

What does the research say? What is the evidence for its efficacy?

Whilst there have been some reported studies utilizing the Symbol Mastery component of the Davis Program which were single case studies or very small group studies, there were no long term follow up reports. One larger study of 48 first graders examined the beneficial effects of integrating Davis Learning Strategies on sight word recognition. The study reported beneficial effects for both the control group and the test group. Retesting at Grade 3 showed that students had maintained the benefits initially gained in Grade 1. It should be noted that one of the authors of this study was Ron Davis. While a number of anecdotal reports exist, no independent research on the efficacy of the Davis program could be found, nor any randomised clinical trials. No studies on the claimed effects of the Davis Program on other learning problems such as dysgraphia, dyscalculia, ADD, auditory perception deficits or motor coordination difficulties could be found. It appears, then, that there is no reliable scientific evidence to support the efficacy of the Davis Program.

The MUSEC verdict: Not Recommended.

Key references may be found at:
<http://www.mq.edu.au/musec>

Macquarie University Special Education Centre
Building X5A, Macquarie University NSW 2109
Ph: 9850 8691 Fax: 9850 8254



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