

Hello,

My name is Vicki Campbell. I have been a first-grade teacher for 17 years. For the first 15 of those years I was the designated MSI teacher in our elementary school and had a classroom which consisted of students identified at risk for Specific Language Difficulty using the Slingerland Kindergarten Pre-Reading Screener. When I use the term MSI please be aware that it means a Simultaneous Multi-Sensory Language Instruction base on the Orton-Gillingham method, approved by the International Dyslexia Association. My class also had typical first graders that had shown no difficulty on the screener.

I would like to share with you a little of my educational history, that of my daughters and a sample of the children I have taught. After earning my Bachelors in Elementary Education from the University of Alaska, I took a summer course in the Slingerland method of language instruction. During this intensive 4-week course I came to realize I had many holes in my English Language foundation. Although I graduated with honors from UAA, the Slingerland course filled in many of the gaps I had with Phonological Awareness, Phonics, and structural analysis that I had not been exposed to in my early school education. I became a better reader and writer after the course. I was originally taught how to read using the Whole Language method of See Dick and Jane. While learning more about dyslexia, I realized I was an undiagnosed dyslexic, and that my youngest daughter had been identified as also being dyslexic. Time constraints make it impossible for me to fully explain the impact dyslexia had on my self-esteem. Suffice it to say, I still expect to be told I am truly not qualified to do what I love to do, which is to teach children how to read.

Five years before my taking the Slingerland course, my youngest daughter was screened with the Kindergarten Screener and identified as being at risk for having dyslexia. I was advised to place my daughter in the Slingerland classroom. Not understanding the ramifications of my choice, I followed the advice of a teacher that taught my middle daughter. This daughter had had excelled in her classroom. This teacher said she was Slingerland trained and she could give my youngest what she needed without me placing her in a

classroom that quote “goes really slow”. My youngest was still not an a fluent reader by the 4th grade, imagine my disenchantment when I was told by this same teacher 5 years later, that she really didn’t believe in the Slingerland method and didn’t use it in her classroom. My daughter of 30 still deals with the impact of dyslexia in her life because of my decision based on that dishonesty.

I have had a range of student come through my classroom. One student worked very hard and took summer school MSI classes every summer for 3 years. He family was in the military and when his parents transferred they found another school in the new district that recognized dyslexia. During the 4th grade all of his hard work started to pay off. He was beginning to overcome the profound effects of dyslexia. Retention was never a possibility because it has a negative effect on students. Most of my students showed no outward signs of not being able to learn to read. I could see some of the students had minor struggles with a weakness in the auditory or visual areas or some with kinesthetic difficulties. By the end of first grade the majority of students had made the gains that showed their parents and myself they were ready for 2nd grade. The ones that were still not quite there went into the 2nd grade MSI class. Again retention wasn’t considered because research shows that retention doesn’t have a positive impact. By the end of the first quarter the majority of those students had closed the gap between their reading performance and that of the peers. At the same time I saw this success, I also saw students who struggled to learn how to read. They were usually very bright and their parents elected not to place them in the MSI classroom. During my 15 years every child identified as being at risk that went into the non-MSI classroom, struggled to keep pace with their peers. At the end of the 1st grade, the parents agreed with a 2nd grade MSI classroom and those students would usually close the gap by the end of the 2nd grade year.

I share this information to explain to you why I believe Alaska needs formal teacher training in SBRR methods for teaching. We need well-trained teachers that understand that 1 out of 5 of our students will not learn to their full potential if they are not taught using a Simultaneous Multi-Sensory Language Instruction method. Some may learn enough to get along but will

be held back by lack of confidence in using their home language. Dyslexia affects people to different degrees: some may just be poor spellers while others may not be able to read or write without many years of support. Teachers need to be taught that Simultaneous MLI is the way ALL children can learn to read and be taught how our language works. I never want another child to suffer because his/her teacher didn't have the knowledge to share with them.

Our teacher universities and colleges in the state of Alaska need to be leaders in the science of reading. Our school districts need to support the science of reading. Teachers cannot teach what they do not know. My classroom wasn't a dreary place of drill and kill. I taught the same curriculum as the other first grade classes. We celebrated when we learned the alphabet, we created books that the student would read together. We played with the sounds of language because learning how to manipulate the sounds can be fun and instructive at the same time. Children came to school with the expectation of learning to read and were not disappointed. They learned to read because the language instruction was given to them in a way that they could learn.

I'll close with a short story. I was teaching MSI summer school and had a 2nd grader in my class. This student had been through 2 years of public schooling, plus the previous summer using the school curriculum. Unbeknownst to me the student said they would "give me one week" to prove that they were learning or would quit summer school. I found this out the last day of summer school. I looked at the student and said, "you must have had fun". The student replied, I wasn't having fun, I was learning!" Even 2nd graders understand the importance of learning to read and will search for it.