

Arlene had always believed in a Whole Language approach.



So why is she such a strong advocate for *Jolly Phonics*?

Jolly
A Phonics Case Study

My journey with Jolly Phonics

by Arlene Grierson, Grade 1 teacher and former Kindergarten teacher



FIRST came across *Jolly Phonics* in 1996. I liked its multisensory approach, and the order in which the letter sounds were introduced. This has clearly been chosen to help develop blending skills (unlike a program I'd used which hampered this development by teaching all the consonant sounds before

any of the vowels!). Even with only the first group of letter sounds in *Jolly Phonics* (**s, a, t, i, p, n**), children can read and spell many simple words, and can begin to unlock the alphabetic code.

I did have reservations though. I knew my Kindergarten children would have a vast range of skills and maturity levels, and would come from very different backgrounds. Many would lack early literacy skills and be considered "at risk" of failure as a result. I thought they wouldn't all be ready for the whole-class direct instruction in *Jolly Phonics*, and that it might even prove counterproductive. As a whole language teacher who taught phonics in the context of literature, adopting *Jolly Phonics* was a big step. However,

I believed in its potential, and decided to go ahead with the change.

I made two modifications. Our Kindergarten children only attend school for half-days, so I decided to go more slowly than *The Phonics Handbook* recommends, introducing one new sound each week instead of five. I also modified the typeface, as I preferred "ball and

stick" printing to the joining tails used in England. I started teaching from *The Phonics Handbook*, which I integrated with other children's literature. I helped the children relate their phonics to the words they saw and heard around them. For "show and tell," I asked them to bring things beginning with that week's sound, which we would label and add to a sound table. With their parents' help, the children brought in everything under the sun, including siblings or grandparents whose names began with the current sound! The children also searched our room each week for items beginning with the current sound, and wrote labels for them, as they added them to our sound table.

My initial doubts were rapidly overcome! The children absolutely loved *Jolly Phonics*, as did their parents. It seemed especially to engage those very active children I'd always found hardest to reach. I realize now that the program I previously used didn't meet their kinesthetic learning needs. After only a few weeks with *Jolly Phonics*, I was completely overwhelmed by my students' progress in both reading and writing. In all my 20 years of teaching, never before had one single change had such an impact on the children's literacy skills. And the most dramatic improvement was with those children I used to find hardest to reach!

Now I realize that these first improvements were just the tip of the iceberg. Things really took off once I started to use the program more effectively, using songs and games to integrate each new sound with those we had already learned. I invented a game to enliven flash card practice, which the children loved so much that they often played it on their own initiative! Another favorite game was acting out words from the Word Boxes in *The Phonics Handbook*. One child

would do the actions for the other children to blend and decode. They loved this game and soon excelled at it. I began to appreciate the flexibility of the story outlines in *The Phonics Handbook*, which I could adapt to make relevant to my class. Even once I knew how *Jolly Phonics* empow-er-ed

children, I still had doubts about providing a single direct-instruction program to children of all abilities. I decided it would help if I created a set of *Jolly Jingles*. These are little rhymes for each sound, set to familiar tunes. They use rhyme and alliteration extensively, to help develop phonemic awareness, and they help reach musical learners. My class would sing through the appropriate *Jingle* as part of the introduction or review of each sound. We could clap as we sang to focus on the syllables, or we could think up alternative rhymes. The children loved these exercises, and I felt confident that now I was offering them whole-group multi-level learning. While the *Jingles* are not essential to *Jolly Phonics*, they have enhanced my children's skills and have made the repeated review of the sounds more fun. In 1998 I transferred to College Street School to teach Grade 1. My new class had not yet received synthetic phonics instruction, so I used *Jolly Phonics* as part of my language arts program, giving the children new *Jingles* each week to read and sing to their parents. To help the children see the relevance and potential of their new skills, I integrated *Jolly Phonics* through my whole Grade 1 program. The children used the sounds, actions and common language of *Jolly Phonics* to help one another in reading and writing sessions. It is their writing which most clearly shows how the children have benefited from *Jolly Phonics*. Parents and visiting teachers are amazed at how easy it is to read their writing, as even the developmental spelling is phonetically correct. Whereas in

Kindergarten acting out words was an oral activity, in Grade 1, while one child acts out a word, the others carefully print the letter(s) for each sound and blend them to read the word. This also helps me, as by looking at the children's writing I gain a very clear picture of which sounds need most review. My Grade 1 children love the *Jolly Phonics* actions, and the kinesthetic learners find them especially helpful. I

have learned that *Jolly Phonics* is compatible with a rich balanced literacy program. A whole is the sum of its parts, and one of the most important parts in developing young children's literacy skills is phonics. I am now a strong advocate for *Jolly Phonics*, and am delighted that, following a rigorous analysis of phonics programs, the National Reading Panel recognized that "unlike many older phonics approaches, *Jolly Phonics* promotes playful, creative, flexible teaching that fits well with whole language practice and leads directly to authentic reading and writing." I have given presentations where I've introduced many teachers to *Jolly Phonics*, and have heard nothing but the highest praise for the program.

Both veteran and novice teachers find it effective and engaging. Many wish they'd started

using it sooner. As teachers, we truly want to give children the best start possible, and *Jolly Phonics* helps us do just that.

"In all my 20 years of teaching, no single change has ever had this much impact."

"The most dramatic improvement was with those children I used to find hardest to reach!"

"Parents and visiting teachers are amazed"

"I created a Jolly Jingle for each sound, to help develop phonemic awareness."

Niagara Video available

The School Board in Niagara have produced a highly praised professional development video designed for a successful balanced literacy program. *Jolly Phonics*, including the *Jolly Jingles*, are featured in it. The three-part, 90 minute video and handbook cost \$95. (including shipping). Order from: Ms J Gruarin, DSB of Niagara, Educational Resources Centre, Highway #20, Alanburg, Ontario. Phone: 905-227-5551, ext 2208.

Reaching large classes

by Karen Tylee (left) and Sandra McIntyre (right), Kindergarten teachers

OUR JUNIOR and Senior Kindergarten classes are combined. This past year we had three teachers with 75 children in the mornings and two teachers with 43 children in the afternoons. Initially we were concerned that *Jolly Phonics* would not be effective with such large numbers. The children responded with great

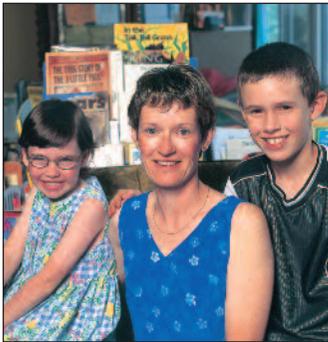
enthusiasm, however, and our fears proved unfounded. It was Arlene's enthusiasm which inspired us to try *Jolly Phonics*, and we find her *Jingles* highly effective and motivating; the children's enthusiasm is keen. Sandra helped Arlene with the musical settings, and the children heard on the *Jingles* CD are from our

"We were astounded with the success!"



Kindergarten. Both our Junior and Senior Kindergarten students apply their *Jolly Phonics* knowledge when sounding out simple words. Many Seniors are now writing their own stories and reading emergent level books. We receive many enthusiastic

comments from parents about their children's accomplishments. We were astounded with the success of the program in developing the children's literacy this year, and we are confident that they will continue to flourish. Our new students are in for a treat!



Jolly Phonics and my children

by Debbie Simpson, mother of Krista, 6, and Jeremy, 10

the learning exciting and easy. Our daughter Krista is in Grade 1 and has had the benefit of *Jolly Phonics*. At 6, she enjoys reading. At first she would bring home her Sound Book to sing and act out the *Jingles* for us. Then, as she learned more sounds, she tried to read every word she saw. Now she is not afraid to tackle new words, even big ones. It's great to see how confident she is, and how eager she is to read

on her own. This confidence also shows in her writing. She sounds out words and uses *Jolly Phonics* to figure out how to spell them. Jeremy, our son, is in Grade 4. The school didn't use *Jolly Phonics* when he was younger. At 10 he is a good student but he doesn't show a love of reading. In Grade 1 he

didn't have the skills or confidence to tackle new words and often struggled to finish reading assignments. He still struggles over big new words and only reads if he has to. We believe that, with *Jolly Phonics*, he would have had more confidence and might have been reading for pleasure. As a classroom helper, it was wonderful to see how much fun the children had with *Jolly Phonics*. With Arlene Grierson's enthusiasm and praise, *Jolly Phonics* has given Krista a great foundation for life.

"Jolly Phonics has helped give our daughter a foundation for life!"

"At 6, Krista reads and writes with confidence"

AS THE mother of two children I have seen what a positive difference *Jolly Phonics* can make. It helps children learn to read and write with confidence, and makes

Helping our school succeed

by Judy Brown, Principal



experienced and new teachers alike. I watched and evaluated the performance of these teachers and the students from a distance to get a realistic picture of how valuable the program might be.

One day I visited a Kindergarten classroom and watched 4- and 5-year-olds spelling words with confidence and excitement. On another day I visited a Grade 1 classroom where the same level of enthusiasm was evident as students read stories and wrote, using a well-developed knowledge of phonics. I was impressed at how well the boys and girls were reading for their developmental level. I was hooked!

"Jolly Phonics has made a difference - I recommend it"

"I saw 4 & 5-year-olds spelling with confidence and excitement"

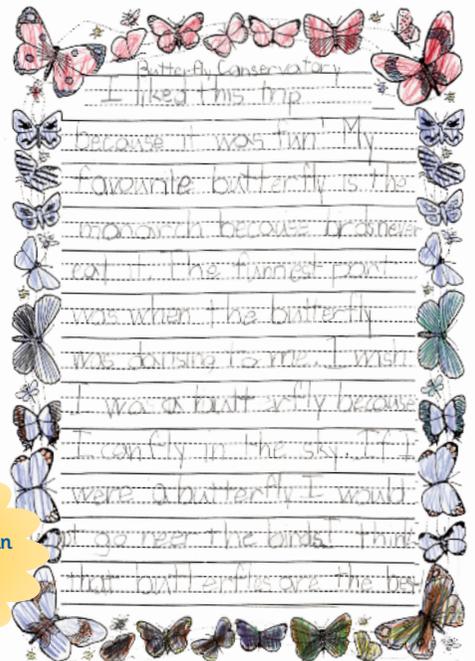
OVER MY career as an educator I have been part of many new programs which have had varying degrees of success. When I came to College Street School last year as Principal, *Jolly Phonics* was being implemented in the entire primary division by

My staff have found great success with *Jolly Phonics*. The children sing the *Jingles*, know the actions and use their knowledge to read and write. Parents tell me that their children can read words on road signs, read library books, and

Jolly Phonics has made a difference in the delivery of curriculum at our school. I would recommend it to any teacher looking for a successful tool to teach reading and writing.

practice spelling and writing new words independently at home. *Jolly Phonics* is the topic frequently talked about in our classrooms!

Daniel's work is typical of 6-year-olds in Arlene's class taught with *Jolly Phonics*



How College Street students compare nationally

by Janet Killins, Consultant for Research, Assessment and Evaluation, District School Board of Niagara (DSBN)



THE MAJORITY of Grade 2 students in DSBN were tested on vocabulary and comprehension (Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test) in March 2000. I was involved in analyzing the results. The average for Grade 2 students in DSBN

was 100, which was also the average for Canada as a whole. At College Street School, which was piloting the use of *Jolly Phonics* in a balanced reading program, the average score was 104. This means that the average College Street student was equal in ability to, or better than 58% of all other students nationwide. Only two schools in the whole of the Board scored slightly higher on the test. Both were schools with students of above-average verbal ability (on the Canadian Cognitive Abilities Test). By contrast, students at College Street range from below-average to average in verbal ability. Despite

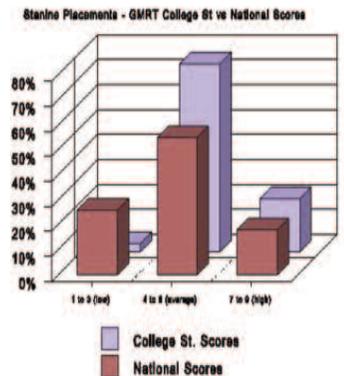
“The average gain was 14 months, 5 months ahead of the national norm”

Typically girls score 4 points higher than boys in comprehension, but at College Street boys scored 1.6 points higher than girls. This raises the distinct possibility that using *Jolly Phonics* in a balanced reading program counter-acts boys' underperformance. The College Street students were also given a Word Attack test (the Woodcock

Johnson Test of Achievement) in September 1999 and again in June 2000. Over this 9-month period, the average gain was 14 months, 5 months ahead of the national norm.

These results definitely give us hope for increased student achievement in reading as we further implement *Jolly Phonics* as part of a balanced literacy program across the School Board.

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Learning from the teachers I work with

by Diane Cooper, Language Consultant, District School Board of Niagara (DSBN)

OVER THE past few years I have had many opportunities to see and hear about the positive impact of *Jolly Phonics*. I've spoken with

teachers new to the profession and to those with 30 years of experience. The message given by both conveys enormous respect for

the program's efficacy.

I was skeptical when I first heard about it, and must credit the teachers that I work with for

helping me to recognize the key role *Jolly Phonics* can play in early literacy development.

With research indicating the importance of early success in literacy acquisition, I see *Jolly Phonics* as a welcome tool for all primary teachers.

Seeing both students and teachers benefit

by Ardeth Staz, Superintendent of Curriculum, District School Board of Niagara (DSBN)

FIRST learned about *Jolly Phonics* when Diane Cooper told me about the wonderful program being used by Arlene Grierson and other teachers at College Street School. Diane had been working with several schools to implement a balanced literacy program in early primary grades, and was excited to tell me about some of the ways in which Arlene was using *Jolly Phonics* as part of her balanced program.

Diane took me to visit, and what I saw and heard was very encouraging. The group of Grade 1 children I watched were quite skilled in their reading, and what struck me most was their high level of confidence and fluency – remarkably so for emergent readers. I knew the children came from a variety of backgrounds and yet they were quite skilled for such an early point in their Grade 1 year. In addition, when they were

involved in the *Jolly Phonics* component of the program, they enjoyed themselves immensely. I was impressed with the way Arlene was using the program. She had very cleverly integrated the sounds into poems with added music, and was using *Jolly Phonics* as part of her balanced approach to literacy, combining it with other reading and writing activities.

Still I was skeptical. I had seen a number of programs over the years and wanted to know how this one would be different in the long run. Diane had been working with the school to collect some comparative data on the student's achievement. As the various measures were analyzed, we began to note very real gains, as Janet Killins summarizes above. What seemed to have an impact on literacy skill development,

“What struck me most was their high level of confidence and fluency”

really did so. The children, almost without exception, were using the tools of *Jolly Phonics* to learn to read and then write.

Another effect of the program was on the boys. Typically boys seem to lag behind girls at this early stage and are less motivated to read. Generally, we have waited for them to catch up as they mature. However, boys involved in the *Jolly Phonics* program at College Street, as well as in other schools now beginning to use the program, have made greater gains than the girls. I attribute this

“The Jolly Phonics actions seem to help boys reach their full potential earlier and be more motivated”

to the use of the *Jolly Phonics* actions, which seem to help boys reach their full potential earlier and be more motivated to read and write.

Another factor at College Street



was the teachers' professional growth and enjoyment. Several were working together to learn as much as they could about integrating *Jolly Phonics* into their balanced literacy program. As a result, their efficacy as professionals was high, and they were having fun learning, too.

It is rewarding to know that in some small way, I have been able to support the growth and development of both children in our schools and their teachers.

I would be pleased to provide additional information by e-mail at ardeth.staz@dsbn.edu.on.ca