

Jolly Phonics



How Jolly Phonics changed our classes

Kimball Hill School, Rolling Meadows, IL

A Case Study



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By Pat Juza, Kindergarten Teacher, Kimball Hill School, Rolling Meadows, IL

Recently, a group of administrators around the country were in my district for a quality visit. They visited my classroom and were surprised to discover we had two half-day kindergarten classes rather than all day. One principal asked how I withstood the pressure of the *No Child Left Behind* initiative with only two and a half hours of instruction time a day.

I really had not thought of it before, but I feel no pressure. My children feel no pressure. The reason is *Jolly Phonics*. My children leave my classroom better readers and writers than they did before the program. We are having more fun getting to that point. My parents are happy with their child's progress and have concrete things that they can work on at home. I no longer hear, "My child is bored."

About six years ago, I attended a meeting of district kindergarten teachers to discuss how to get children to write. I had heard over and over again "They learn to write by writing", but I felt very ineffective when it came to helping them do that. I had been teaching sounds but not the same way every year. I tried to tie the sounds to things we were studying or introduced a letter a week. I had been through whole language, but knew that some children needed a more structured approach to the reading process.

One of my colleagues, Patty Clark, brought samples of her students' writing to that district meeting. The work was incredible. I could actually read their writing! I had to know what she did to get this caliber of writing! I was introduced to *Jolly Phonics*.

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Jolly Phonics is a systematic program that introduces children to 42 speech sounds in a multi-sensory way. Each sound is introduced with a short story accompanied by an action directly from the story. The sounds are introduced in seven groups. After learning the first six *Jolly Phonics* sounds, children are able to blend simple three-letter words. They are so excited because they are finally reading! We reinforce the sounds by blending, showing the videos, singing *Jolly Jingles*, and later in the year, reading the *Jolly Readers*.

The letter is introduced using the sound only. We do not call this letter an 's' we call it /s/ (the sound). The fact that letters also have names is introduced to the children later. I was at first a little skeptical as I had always taught the names either before or in conjunction with the sounds. It did not take long to have a change of heart! I noticed immediately the children were attending more to print. "There is /a/. There is /t/." They would then blend those two sounds and be overjoyed when they figured out the word was 'at'. Saying the letter names would not have brought them to that conclusion. In order to read you need to know the sound the letter makes not the name of the letter. My children had no trouble picking up the names of the letters. In fact they picked them up quicker.

Learning the sounds first eliminated a lot of the confusion for them. They no longer think 'w' makes the /d/ sound just because the name of the letter begins with the /d/ sound.

I cover at least three sounds each week beginning the first week of school. I am usually finished with the sounds by the end of January. From that point on we practice our sounds by reading and writing. The fact that the sounds are introduced with lower case letters has really helped my

children eliminate capital letters in their writing except at the beginning. I use to spend a lot of time on phonemic awareness activities but the awareness that words are made up of sounds comes naturally with the *Jolly Phonics* program. We are blending after just two weeks of school. The children are very excited when they are able to blend a big word like 'storm' or 'rooster'! When my children write a word you can hear them segmenting it and writing each sound.

My bilingual students have responded well to the program as have my special needs children. The action for the sound is a great help to these students. The assistant who works with the intervention children feels she can always use the action as a clue when they get stuck on a sound. Before *Jolly Phonics* she had a hard time trying to help them remember the sound.

The first grade teachers are very happy with the writing they get at the beginning of the year. They were all very enthusiastic about *Jolly Phonics*. One teacher said, "It is wonderful to be able to start the year from such a higher level. They are uninhibited while writing. Already, many have caught on to writing about a topic. We will be able to discuss paragraphs much sooner than last year." Joanne Madden remarked, "The children are transitioning to correct spelling much earlier than in the past. Our word wall words are being learned much faster. I am so very excited by the program! The kids are so confident and are willing to attack new words because they know they can figure it out."

Two years ago I worked with two part-time teachers who had moved down from upper grades and never taught kindergarten before. They were overjoyed with how easy the program was to just pick up and teach. What was surprising to both of them was the ease with which the children picked up the short vowels and double vowel sounds. They had

thought those sounds would be too hard for five and six year olds to hear.

I must admit to agreeing with them at one time. I would teach the short vowel sounds but had a difficult time explaining all the words that didn't have short vowels in them. With *Jolly Phonics* I have more than doubled the sounds I now teach. I teach the long vowel sounds as well as the alternate spellings for them, such as /ai/ in 'rain', /ay/ in 'play' and /a-e/ in 'made'. Not all the students may retain every single alternate spelling, but it is now easy for me to assist my children in sounding out a word with a long vowel sound and they are able to write many more words using the long vowel sounds they know. When they are reintroduced to these sounds in first grade they will have already been exposed to these harder sounds. *Jolly Phonics* has helped me realize that I was underestimating my students.

My district adopted a new reading series several years ago but those of us who use *Jolly Phonics* were given permission to substitute it for the phonics component of the adopted program. *Jolly Phonics* blends easily with the other components of this program. My children consistently do well on the end of the unit assessments that came with the adopted program.

One of my students was out a week on vacation. When he walked in, the first thing he did was show me a souvenir from his trip and then he asked, "How many sounds did I miss? You're gonna catch me up today, right?"

Parents love the program because of the progress they see and the excitement the children bring home. *Jolly Phonics* has a wonderful parent component that promotes practice at home in reviewing sounds, blending, and writing words. The comments I get back with the report card usually have a direct reference to the *Jolly Phonics* program. I sent out a survey to parents to get their reaction to the program. Their responses were all positive. One of my parents wrote, "I like the program a lot. I have a first grader and kindergartner that enjoy reading very much. I think it is due to

this program." Another felt, "My son has become much more confident in himself and his writing because of this program. I think it's terrific!"

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The parents were amazed at how fast the children picked up the sounds. "I am so impressed with how quickly my son has learned all of his sounds! It must be fun and that has certainly helped him."

I have grown in the way I use the program over the last six years. I feel I am getting better results with *Jolly Phonics* this year than the first year I used it. The children are so secure with the writing process that now we work on using the conventions of print such as capital letters, periods, spaces, and spelling 'tricky' words correctly. Last year I began giving the children dictation at

least twice a week starting in early December. I dictate ten sounds and they write them. It is not a testing situation but a learning one. We talk about what letter they should have written and they correct it if they made a mistake. By the spring I am dictating ten words and a sentence that they write on the back of their sheet.

I don't have formal data to show that my children are doing better with this program. However, I can see it in the writing they produce in their journals and on the *Richard Gentry Monster Spelling Test*. I can hear it in the books they choose to read during their free choice and the help they give me as I read to them. I can feel it in the delight they express as we are learning together. No, I don't have the pressure from the *No Child Left Behind* initiative. My children are performing beautifully, better than ever before. I am so thankful that I found the *Jolly Phonics* program!





Helping our students read above grade level

By Mary Zarr, Principal, Kimball Hill School, Rolling Meadows, IL

As I began my first year as principal of Kimball Hill School, I had wondered what types of questions the parents might ask me the first time we met. It didn't take long to find out. I was working at the registration table in August when a kindergarten parent approached and said, "Mrs. Zarr, I don't care what else you change around here, but please don't change *Jolly Phonics*!" She then proceeded to tell me how her older child had not had the benefit of the program, but her middle child had achieved great success because of *Jolly Phonics*. She wanted to make sure that her youngest child would be getting the "full treatment". Well, she certainly had my attention and the kindergarten room was one of my first stops the very next day. Pat Juza, kindergarten teacher extraordinaire, patiently and passionately explained the program to me. Having been a former first grade teacher for many years and an elementary curriculum coordinator, I was very impressed with the concept and couldn't wait to see it in action.

This systematic program addresses the needs of all learners. Since each sound is introduced with an action, it reaches auditory, visual and kinesthetic learners. The phonemic awareness that is interwoven into each activity produces an almost uncanny comprehension of the letter/sound relationship in children so young. I witnessed the

introduction of complicated vowel sounds and blends that are usually introduced in the second part of first grade in most reading series. Chunking, blending and sounding out are all natural outcomes of the systematic use of this program. *Jolly Phonics* introduces sound groups that accelerate the child's mastery of the letter sound relationship. This leads to great excitement in the young readers whose confidence is building at every step.

With all eyes on student achievement in this day and age, how fortunate we are to have found *Jolly Phonics*. With adequate yearly progress being monitored for students in every sub-group and those with special needs as well, we feel *Jolly Phonics* fits the bill as a united instructional approach, which offers something for everyone. We are a very diverse district with 72 different languages spoken and the



actions used in *Jolly Phonics* are universal. I have seen language barriers dissolve as the children mimic the action of the sound. Research certainly supports that students retain more of what they learn when it is integrated in a meaningful way as opposed to learning skills in isolation. This fact is

immediately apparent when you observe the *Jolly Phonics* program. One of my greatest thrills as a principal is being read to by our students. The accelerated acquisition of letter/sound relationships produced by the use of the *Jolly Phonics* program will make you completely rethink any expectations that you might have had for your young writers in kindergarten. The stories they produce on their own in the writing center are astounding. Recently I was visited in my office by two girls who came to read me a delightful story about a princess. It was ten pages long! They read it to me, but I had no trouble reading every word they had written. I can't tell you how impressed I was with what they were able to do! I was excited, they were excited and now the class is producing so many wonderful stories, that I am making a point of going to the writing center each week just so they can read to me. Imagine how proud I was of them all during our last Quality Symposium when we hosted school board members, administrators and teachers from around the country. They could hardly believe what they were seeing in that kindergarten class, and were even more astounded when they found out that we have half-day kindergarten.

One of our student performance targets is that every child entering kindergarten at Kimball Hill will read at or above grade level by the time they complete second grade. Since we fully implemented *Jolly Phonics*, you can bet we are well on our way to meeting that stellar mark.



Jolly Phonics gave my family a solid foundation in reading

By Mary Christensen, Parent

My oldest son was in a self-contained class in kindergarten and professional staff felt that he was ready for 1st grade with specialized instruction. My husband and I felt in our hearts that our son needed to be introduced to *Jolly Phonics*. Although the school he was attending was in the same district, it did not teach the *Jolly Phonics* program. We decided to have him repeat kindergarten at his home school, where they did teach *Jolly Phonics*. We have not been sorry we made that decision. Our son is now in the second grade and is reading two years above grade level!

We were first exposed to this extraordinary program when our daughter was in kindergarten two years earlier. We were extremely pleased with the program. Our daughter, who is now in fifth grade, loves reading and writing. She reads at a seventh grade level.

We now have a second son in kindergarten who has gone through the *Jolly Phonics* program. When each and every new sound was introduced he would act as if it were his birthday! No matter what was happening in the house at the time of his arrival, we all had to drop everything to see and hear his new action/sound! His excitement for this program makes it easier to work with our child outside of school. Before my kindergartner started the program

it was difficult to get him to sit down and listen to a book. Now he constantly asks to be read to and he wants to try to sound out the words and read every other page.

We have been so fortunate to have had all three of our children go through the *Jolly Phonics* program and to have had such a knowledgeable and passionate teacher as Mrs. Juza.

Both my husband and I feel we gave our children a great head start in learning by making sure they went through *Jolly Phonics*. It has given our family a strong foundation for reading without the typical hassle of homework.

Writing samples from Pat Juza's kindergarten class

