

How did saying 'Nnnn' get these children off to a flying start?



Jolly
Phonics

A Case Study

And how does pretending to bat a ball help these children read and write?

The story of a school that changed its literacy teaching

from Ridgewood Public School,
Peel District, Mississauga



Making the change

by JoAnne Schut,
Kindergarten teacher, pictured above

I teach a kindergarten class of children aged 4-5 at the start of the school year. The majority speak Punjabi, Hindi or Urdu as their first language, and many come to my class without knowing a single word of English. This means I must not only introduce them to reading and writing, but to a whole new language.

One of the best resources I use is *Jolly Phonics*, which provides an excellent foundation for reading and writing. I was introduced to the programme through a series of workshops. I was initially reluctant to teach phonics to children so young, but because the instructor was enthusiastic and the material intriguing, I decided to implement the scheme as an experiment. It was only after doing so, that I became fully committed. I had specific expectations for year end growth, based on many years' experience of teaching kindergarten – yet with *Jolly Phonics*, the results exceeded all my expectations. Now all the children could sound out simple words and many were reading easy books. They could write simple sentences and had acquired valuable skills for spelling, reading and writing. I was so impressed with these superb results that *Jolly Phonics* is now an integral part of my curriculum.

Adapting to our needs

Because Canadian children only attend kindergarten for halfdays, I introduce the letter sounds at one per week, more slowly than *The Phonics Handbook* recommends. All letter sounds are taught by the end of the year. Homework sheets are reproduced and sent home over the weekend. The week's activities focus on teaching and reinforcing the letter sound. We enjoy reviewing learned sounds in a group and have fun performing the

humorous actions. I believe these are the key to the programme's success. While enjoying acting out the sounds, the children are acquiring a 'hook' upon which to hang their memory of letter/sound relationships.

I use *Jolly Phonics* as the basis for new ideas too. For instance, the children cut out and glue each sound on a card, to keep in a homemade Sound Box. I also make a point of showing letters both with and without joining tails. Children see print in many arenas of life, and should recognize that letters can be written in different ways.

Parents' involvement

Parents' involvement is very important. They help to oversee homework, enjoy helping children make words with their Sound Boxes, and often express delight at what has been grasped. They are amazed at the immediate results! Many share anecdotes such as: 'In the store, Sandra says "I can read that, it says exit!" or 'Aaron sounds out words he sees when we're driving.' The children are interested, motivated and really want to read! Parents even tell me the children love to get their

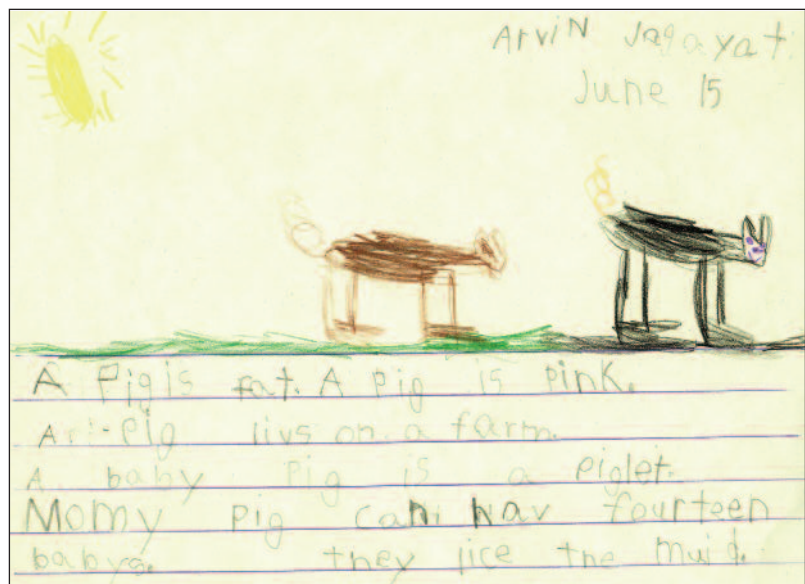
homework and are quite disappointed if, for some reason, it is not sent home on Friday.

Children's confidence

One reason the children are so highly motivated is the wonderful variety of materials available: the *Jolly Phonics Videos, Jiglets, Stencilets and Wall Frieze*, as well as all the books. The characters, such as Snake and Bee, are lovable and the children very quickly bond with them. This high level of motivation is maintained. Phonics is not taught as an add-on but as an integral means of acquiring literacy skills. The children, including many who were initially reluctant, develop confidence in their ability to read and write because they have a 'tool' – their understanding of the sound/symbol relationships – to help them reach their full potential.

Phenomenal results

I will continue to use *Jolly Phonics* for one simple reason – it works! I would highly recommend it to any teacher who wants to establish a wonderful foundation for literacy. The results are phenomenal!



A typical writing sample by Arvin in Senior Kindergarten (age 5)

Changes to our teaching by Phylis Trudeau, Kindergarten teacher, pictured on the front cover

When I was first introduced to *Jolly Phonics* I was concerned that the vocabulary would be too sophisticated for our ESL children. I also felt that the use of joining tails in letter formation might be confusing, and the idea of using the programme was dismissed until the following year. This time we had in-service courses and support, and *Jolly Phonics* was introduced thoroughly in both Junior and Senior Kindergarten.

Initial concerns

The programme provides a structured learning tool which the children really enjoy – the actions and bright colours catch and maintain their interest. I was still concerned that the pace might be too ambitious for Junior Kindergarten, so to help the 3 and 4-year-olds make the link between sound, action and letter, my teaching partner and I thought up an activity for each sound. For example, *Jolly Phonics* introduces the 'N' sound with a story about a plane, and an action which has the children waving their arms like planes, while making the 'Nnn' sound. Building on this, we made paper planes, attached them to strings and flew them around the room while making the sound.

Effective decoding

Later I transferred to the Senior Kindergarten class, where the children continue to be enthusiastic about learning the sounds and are able to apply their decoding skills more effectively. We use a variety of materials, including simple reading books which allow the children to use their phonetic skills. Children also work with parent volunteers in small groups to read and write stories. The skills they acquire with *Jolly Phonics* help them with creative writing.

Parents are vital, and each September, we meet them in small groups to discuss Kindergarten routines and goals. This is when we introduce them to the phonics homework. We include reminders in our monthly newsletter and thank the parents for their help. They also offer positive feedback. A parent told me her child had picked up a book in the doctor's waiting room and begun to read it out loud. People were amazed that she could read so well and with such enthusiasm at her age.

I have always found *The Phonics Handbook* easy to follow, and it lends itself to modifications and revisions too. Initially I changed some of the worksheets to use our print letter formation. However, recently we rethought this issue and decided that the children needed exposure to a number of types of letter formation. We simply tell them that letters can be made in different ways but we emphasize our basic ball and stick formation. This has not

caused any confusion.

Previously we concentrated on teaching

Scope for our own ideas

the alphabet and some phonetic sounds. These were taught incidentally rather than systematically, and only in initial position. *Jolly Phonics* stresses initial, middle and

final positions of the sounds. This improves auditory discrimination which increases the child's ability to decode. Each year we add new ideas to our implementation of the programme – recently we introduced a sound book and writing journal and are extremely pleased with the results.

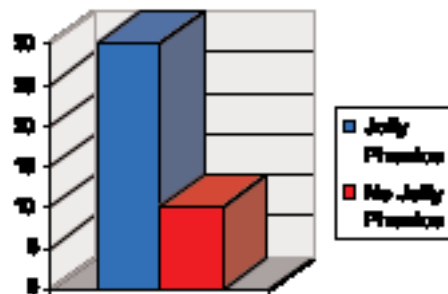
Comparison of Ridgewood children taught with *Jolly Phonics* to other children taught without *Jolly Phonics*

In 1997, a study was conducted by a team of researchers at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. The study was to examine how senior kindergarten children at Ridgewood Public School compared to senior kindergarten students in other public schools within the area, on standardized measures of reading and writing. The children at Ridgewood

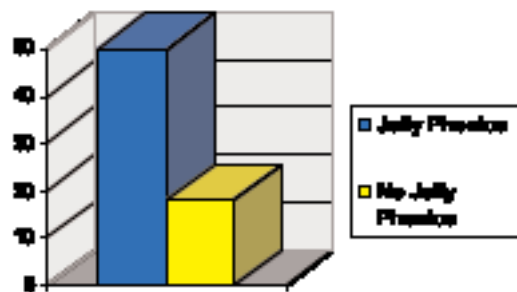
received the *Jolly Phonics* programme in both junior and senior kindergarten (ages 4 and 5), whereas children in comparison schools did not receive such training. Results revealed that children at Ridgewood scored significantly higher on all measures of reading and spelling.

Two graphs depicting these highly significant differences are presented below:

Number of words read correctly



Number of phonemes spelt correctly



The following samples of dictation illustrate that not only did Ridgewood students spell more words correctly, but the quality of their spelling was superior to that of children from comparison schools (both lists show the same 10 words):

The words dictated:	Typical Ridgewood sample (with <i>Jolly Phonics</i>)	Typical comparison school sample (without <i>Jolly Phonics</i>)
1. and	1. and	1. N A A S
2. in	2. in	2. N T O A S O S O
3. him	3. him	3. m n t o o
4. make	4. mack	4. m e
5. cook	5. c o o k	5. r x c a f
6. must	6. must	6. m s o a r y
7. enter	7. e n t e r	7. A T S P A
8. light	8. l i g h t	8. g t
9. reach	9. R y c h	9. R S O O O O
10. circle	10. S P C L	10. S O O O O O



My 3 children & Jolly Phonics by Jean Cirillo, pictured left

As the mother of three children, all at Ridgewood Public School but each with different experiences of the programme, I think *Jolly Phonics* is an excellent way of making reading and writing fun and easier to learn for children in the primary grades.

Christopher, now in grade 5 (aged 10), did not have *Jolly Phonics* as it was not used in the school when he was in Kindergarten. Although he is now reading at grade 5 level, in grades 1 and 2 he found it very difficult to blend letters together and his reading was halting. Even now he reads from necessity, seldom for enjoyment.

My middle daughter, Samantha, is in Grade 3 (aged 9). Fortunately she started

Senior Kindergarten the year the school implemented *Jolly Phonics*. Thanks to her weekly homework sheets, her Sound Box and all the classroom activities, she was able to sound out, spell and write words at and above her grade level. I also observed her using the actions to the letters when she was sounding out words. Her general enjoyment in being able to read and write continues to this day.

Allison, my youngest daughter, is in Grade 1 (aged 6) and is in her third year of using *Jolly Phonics* as she was enrolled in Junior as well as Senior Kindergarten. She constantly reads everything she can find, as she is able to sound out even the more difficult words, and is currently reading at a level above her age group. I am constantly amazed at how well she and her fellow classmates read and write for their age.

Meeting our needs by Nigel Hussey, Principal, pictured right

I have been using *Jolly Phonics* for five years at two different schools. I was first introduced to *Jolly Phonics* at my previous school when staff were designing a literacy programme to meet the specific needs of our pupils. At both schools we have a very high English as a second language population. In fact we refer to our schools as English Immersion schools. The majority language is Punjabi, which in any given year means it is the first language of approximately 50% of our population, while only 35% identify English as their first language. In total our children speak 19 languages. *Jolly Phonics* provided us with the missing link in our balanced literacy programme.

It fits in extremely well, providing us with a well-paced, systematic, multi-modal method of teaching phonemic awareness. The use of an action for each sound is critical because the children build an association between the action and

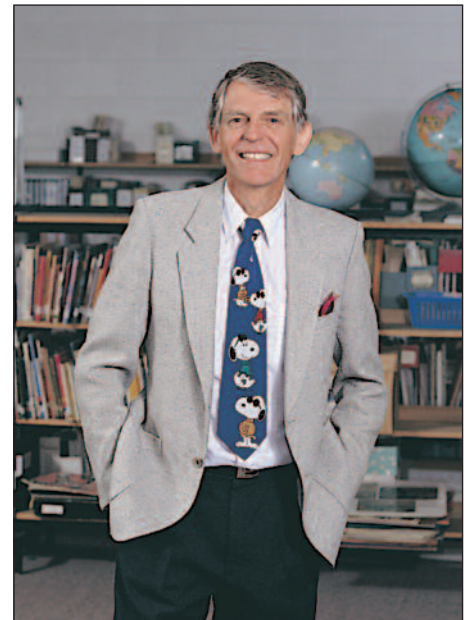
sound, and it is not unusual to see children unlocking words through actions. By teaching the letter sounds in groups that are immediately useable to make words, the children are quickly able to spell, read and write words.

The results in both schools where *Jolly Phonics* has been used, from Kindergarten (age 4-5) through Grade 3 (age 8) as well as by our Special Education and English as a Second Language classes, is that the spelling, reading and writing levels have risen. In recent tests our school scores were well above the provincial average.

The parents love the programme as we can bring them into the learning partnership in a meaningful way. Staff provide parents with phonics materials and instructions to the activities that support what is happening in school. *Jolly Phonics* fits right in with our Book Bag programme. Parents are excited because they want their children to learn and enjoy being able to help.

I see staff, both new and experienced, enthusiastically integrating *Jolly Phonics*

into their programme because it works. We see the excitement of a 5-year-old making words, reading and writing. We see children transfer the learning to work in other subject areas.



Improving performance by John Rennie, Superintendent of Schools

Improving pupil performance, especially in developing competent young readers, is the essence of what education is about. I am a Superintendent of Schools with the Peel District Board of Education in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada, and first encountered the *Jolly Phonics* programme when supervising a unit of approximately 10,000 students of all ages. Two thirds of these children lived in Mississauga's lowest socio-economic area, and there were more new immigrants than in any other unit in Peel. At this time our unit had the lowest reading scores in the region. Now this is far from being the case – thanks to our efforts, the unit's best reading scores equal the best scores in the region of

Peel. The change came about when *Jolly Phonics* was made an integral part of our Primary Division teaching.

The Principals with whom I worked chose *Jolly Phonics* because of research results obtained with Junior and Senior Kindergarten students in the neighbouring Etobicoke, a neighbouring Board of Education. The programme introduces the 42 basic phonemes of English in a manner which the children enjoy, and which improves their performance. *Jolly Phonics* became a basic element in our balanced early literacy programme. Training extended to regular and special needs teachers, school psychologists and support personnel. This created consistency for students who changed schools, not only of the programme itself, but in establishing a common language for literacy teaching. I noted that while

teachers who simply used *The Phonics Handbook* could produce good results, additional teacher training was highly beneficial.

There was an unprecedented improvement in pupil performance – the results were better than we could have hoped. Primary pupils, whether native Canadians or immigrants with English as a second language, demonstrated faster acquisition of the basic letter-sound correspondences than with any other approach we had tried. In comparison with control groups where the programme was not used, *Jolly Phonics* pupils did better in Word Recognition, Spelling, Reading, Real Writing, Word/World Knowledge and Phonics.

I am delighted to take this opportunity to influence how young people are taught, and can be contacted personally at my e-mail address: rennie@bserv.com