**Report on Phonics Teaching Results at Primary Schools**

* Taking Beijing Fangcaodi International School and Beijing Chuiyangliu Central Primary School as Examples

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With support from the headteachers of Beijing Fangcaodi International School and Beijing Chuiyangliu Central Primary School, we used 4 grade 1 classes, 1 grade 2 class in one school campus and 4 grade 1 classes and 2 kindergarten classes in another school to execute the experiment. We used the Burt Test to measure the students' reading age and have carried out research on the effect of synthetic phonics teaching.

The English teaching and research team of Ganluyuan Campus, Beijing Fangcaodi International School has carried out the experiment and practice of synthetic phonics teaching, and the students have achieved remarkable results in phonics and reading. Through the Burt Reading Age Test, we found that the reading level of first-year students who systematically participated in synthetic phonics learning improved at a faster rate than that of the second-year students who did not participate in the use of the approach and was comparable to the reading level of the second-year students.

In Beijing Chuiyangliu Central Primary School, one foreign teacher conducted a year-long experiment of synthetic phonics teaching using “Jolly Phonics” in the school's lower English section and kindergarten. Similarly, through the reading age test, it has been found that the reading level of the first-grade students and kindergarten students who have systematically participated in the learning of synthetic phonics exceeds that of other first-grade students who have not participated in the learning, and the reading level of kindergarten students even greatly exceeds that of the first-grade students.

In this analysis report, we will provide data to show the effects of first-grade students spending 40-50 minutes a week and kindergarten students spending 120 minutes a week learning synthetic phonics.

**I. Overview of Teaching**

ⅰ Grade one

In this study, the first-year students had four 40-minute English lessons a week. Three are taught by an English native speaker teacher and one by a Chinese English teacher. The native speaker teacher spends about a third of their weekly time teaching phonics based on the syllabus of “Jolly Phonics”. In general, students spend 40-50 minutes a week on phonics, and the rest of the time is spent on the school's designated primary school English textbooks (Beijing Edition).

It should be noted that of the four first-grade classes in Chuiyangliu Central Primary school, two of them are taught by a foreign teacher in a systematic way, while the other two classes are taught by different Chinese English teachers. These two classes taught by Chinese English teachers, one of which also had some input of phonics in the class; the other class, which is class 7, grade 1, the input of phonics is almost none.

ii Grade two

The second graders also have four 40-minute English classes a week. One of the four classes is taught by a foreign teacher, and the other three are taught by Chinese English teachers. The same foreign teacher teaches the first grade and second grade, but the second-grade students do not take any phonics classes, instead they focus on oral English classes and use the assigned primary School English textbooks (Beijing Edition).

ⅲ Kindergarten

Kindergarten students have six phonics lessons of 20 minutes per week. All phonics classes are taught in the same way by the first-grade foreign teacher.

ⅳ Teaching methods of synthetic phonics

The foreign teacher gives each class three lessons a week, but the amount of time spent on teaching phonics is not exactly the same. At the beginning of each lesson, students spend a few minutes reviewing the phonemes they learned in the last lesson. When new phonemes are introduced, teachers teach only the sounds of phonemes, not the names of letters. When each sound is learned, it is also accompanied by an action.

Foreign teachers teach students a new sound in two of three classes a week. Students in this class practice spelling words using phonemes they have learned and new phonemes. In this week's third lesson, instead of introducing new phonemes, we review what we have learned earlier.

Usually, in the third lesson of this week, students will also practice reading a story that contains only decodable words. First, students practice reading challenging words with their peers. Then, the teacher spells out the words for the students. Next, students try to read the story by themselves. This is a challenge for many students. When they come across a difficult word, they usually turn to their peers or teachers for help. Finally, the whole class reads the story of the pronunciation of the sounds of the words together.

Phonics activities were arranged in class on an irregular basis throughout the semester, including "read and find", "group dictation" and spelling activities.

"Read and find" activity is done by two students. The teacher gives them each a piece of paper with 20 words containing the most recently taught phonemes. The words on the two sheets of paper are the same, but are put in separate places. A student chooses a word and reads it three times. His/her partner finds the word on his/her own piece of paper. Students take turns reading and looking for different words.

Group dictation activity: two students read and two write in groups of four. Give them each a piece of paper containing words made up of recently taught sounds. Two of them read the word three times. When they finished reading, they represented each sound with an action. The students write out the words they hear, and the reader checks to see if they get it right.

The purpose of describing these activities is to show that we value individual and group exercises and that students have time and opportunity to synthesize knowledge learned in class.

**Ⅱ Reading evaluation**

The Burt Reading Age Test is the authoritative English reading age test throughout the world. In this open-ended assessment, students are asked to read lists of words ranked by difficulty. Students read the words in the word list in the order of difficulty. If 10 words are mispronounced, the test is completed. The results of the test scores provide a rough estimate of a child's reading age.

**ⅰ Evaluation results**

1. **Ganluyuan Campus of Beijing Fangcaodi International School**

In January and June 2019, we tested a sample of the school's first - and second-year students using the Burt Reading Age Test. In June, we added a sample of students who did not take the test in January.

1. Testing in January 2019

A total of 30 students were tested in January 2019. We selected six students from each of the four classes of grade one and six students from one class of Grade Two. Representative students are selected from each class according to their low, moderate or high English reading level (two students from each level).

The test results are as follows:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **The class** | **Words Read Correctly (average)** | **Average reading age** |
| Class 1, Grade 1 | 13.67 | 5 years and 10 months |
| Class 2, Grade 1 | 15.5 | 5 years and 11 months |
| Class 3 Grade 1 | 14.67 | 5 years and 11 months |
| Class 4 Grade 1 | 15.67 | 5 years and 11 months |
| Class 4 Grade 2 | 24 | 6 years and 5 months |

As shown in the table above, the reading age scores of the second graders tested in January are significantly higher than those of the first graders (the average score for the four first grade classes is 14.88, compared with 24 for the second grade, which is 9.12 points higher than the average for the first grade).

2. Test in June 2019

We followed the same 30 students in June 2019. The test results are as follows:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **The class** | **Words Read Correctly (average)** | **Average reading age** |
| Class 1, Grade 1 | 23 | 6 years and 4 months |
| Class 2, Grade 1 | 25.67 | 6 years and 6 months |
| Class 3 Grade 1 | 24 | 6 years and 5 months |
| Class 4 Grade 1 | 20.83 | 6 years and 2 months |
| Class 4 Grade 2 | 25.17 | 6 years and 5 months |

After less than five months of phonics teaching, a class from first graders scored even higher on the reading age test than the students of second grade. We have noticed that the average amount of correct words read by the whole class increases, which shows that the effect of phonics teaching is particularly obvious. (The average score in the first grade is 23.38, compared with 25.17 in second grade, a difference of just 1.79 points.)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **The class** | **Average Increase in Number of Words Read Correctly between January and June Tests** |
| Class 1, Grade 1 | 9.33 |
| Class 2, Grade 1 | 10.17 |
| Class 3 Grade 1 | 9.33 |
| Class 4 Grade 1 | 5.16 |
| Class 4 Grade 2 | 1.17 |

In addition to the 30 students who were followed in January and June 2019, a sample of 66 was tested in June 2019.

Of the 66 students, four first-year classes have 15 students in each class and the remaining six are second-year students. These students represent students at the low, moderate and high levels of English reading ability in the class.

The following table contains 30 students who were followed in January and June, with an additional 66 students. A total of 21 students are sampled from four first-year classes and 12 from second-year classes.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **The class** | **Words Read Correctly (average)** | **Average reading age** |
| Class 1, Grade 1 | 25.62 | 6 years and 6 months |
| Class 2, Grade 1 | 23.76 | 6 years and 5 months |
| Class 3 Grade 1 | 20.05 | 6 years and 2 months |
| Class 4 Grade 1 | 24.14 | 6 years and 5 months |
| Class 4 Grade 2 | 23.08 | 6 years and 4 months |

As noted above, in June 2019, all but one first-year class achieved a higher reading age level than second-year students.

**(2) Beijing Chuiyangliu Central Primary School**

In January and June 2019, we sampled students in two kindergarten classes and four first-grade classes using the Burt Reading Age test. These included two first-year classes that did not participate in systematic synthetic phonics learning.

A total of 36 students were tested in January 2019. We selected six students from each of the four first grade classes as test samples and six students from each of the two kindergarten classes as test samples. Representative students were selected from each class according to their low , moderate or high English reading level (two students from each level in each class).

The test results are as follows:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **class** | **Teacher** | **Jan Reading age** | **June Reading age** | **Improvement** |
| Class 1 G1 | Wu Dan | 5 yrs 6 months | 6 yrs 0 months | 6 months |
| Class 7 G1 | Li Yanping | 6 yrs 2 months | 6 yrs 5 months | 3 months |
| Class 8 G1 | Nick | 5 yrs 11 months | 6 yrs 9 months | 10months |
| Class 9 G1 | Nick | 5 yrs 11 months | 6 yrs 6 months | 7 months |
| K1 | Nick | 6 yrs 1 months | 7 yrs 0 months | 11 months |
| K2 | Nick | 6 yrs 1 months | 6 yrs 11 months | 10 months |

**How can we further improve our achievements?**

For some reason, we were unable to test students' reading age at the start of the new school year in September 2018. It is hard to assume with any certainty what the reading age of the student was at that time. For Beijing Chuiyangliu Central Primary School, the reading age of kindergarten students in January has exceeded the reading age of three classes of first grade, according to the test results.

We believe that the teaching effect of synthetic Phonics will be more obvious. Apart from the Spring Festival Holiday, the period from January to June 2019 was very short, but students had made great progress in improving their reading level.

Most first-grade students (including kindergarten students) have little exposure to English at the beginning of the school year and even less opportunity to read English. According to our experience, the reading age of students at the beginning of the semester is about five years old and five months, and a large proportion of students can read no more than one or two words.

There are many ways to further improve the reading level of first-year students. The following are the main ones:

1. Experienced teachers

This is still the first year of phonics teaching, although the first-grade teacher completed the online teacher training of the Jolly Phonics CPD Course before the new school year began. In view of this, his teaching experience accumulated in this year will make his teaching of Phonics more effective in the second year.

1. Chinese English teachers

The Chinese English teachers have taught some phonics phonemes sporadically to the first-grade class. Judging from the test results of the class, we suggest that the Chinese English teachers be given more phonics teaching training, so that the Chinese English teachers can spend at least 10-15 minutes a day to combine phonics into classroom activities.

(3) Native English speaker teachers

Kindergarten students' achievements and progress show that the difference in progress depends on the frequency of learning. We recommend that first-year students be allowed five times a week to have 20 minutes of phonics and the rest of the time to teach the required English textbook content.

(4) Homework

We did not assign any phonics homework to the students throughout the first year. It might be more effective if students were given appropriate learning resources to practice at home without the help of an English speaker. Students only learn Phonics three times a week. Without extra practice, it is difficult for them to master what they learn in class. If they could practice at home for 40 minutes a week, it would certainly make a big difference to their reading scores.

(5) Decodable picture books

After students learn 30-40 phonemes and some irregular words, they can be introduced to decodable English picture books. The picture books should contain phonemes that have been learned and words that have been taught, and should be read as part of the children's homework. By providing English picture books for students, they can improve their spelling skills and expand their vocabulary naturally, while experiencing the pleasure of reading and keeping their interest in learning English.

(6) More phonics teaching time

If more teaching and learning time is given for phonics each week, students' reading performance will be further improved. Ideally, add at least a few minutes of synthetic phonics each day. In this way, children can have a better impression of phonics phoneme pronunciation. Teachers can also teach more phonemes in a shorter time, thus introducing decodable picture books earlier.

(7) Class reduction or intervention for students with learning difficulties

The current class has more than 35 students per class, especially in the case of the limited phonics teaching time, it is difficult to give feedback to each student. If there are fewer students in the class, it is easier to identify those who are learning with difficulties and give them necessary and targeted help. Also, an extra tutoring session for students in the bottom 20% of each class could prevent them from falling behind.

**Ⅴ Conclusion**

This study demonstrates the effectiveness of the English synthetic phonics classroom teaching. Students who take phonics classes for 40 to 50 minutes a week read English at a level one grade above them.

We tested the reading age of the first and second graders (and first and kindergarten) in two schools, and it was clear that the two groups adopted different reading strategies. Without systematic phonics teaching and training, the second grade students of Ganluyuan Campus of Beijing Fangcaodi International School (and two first-grade class students of Beijing Chuiyangliu Central Primary School) would not try their best to spell the words when they read the them, instead they guessed. For example, they read "went" as "water" or "some" as "small". When they came across new words, they usually did not try to read aloud, but mispronounce the words, or say "I don't know".

However, the students who received systematic synthetic phonics training would not guess the words when reading aloud. They may still mispronounce some, but are more likely to pronounce it as /som-eh/. Even if they read incorrectly, they use the spelling strategies and techniques they have learned.

Another achievement that is difficult to quantify is that students who have been trained in systematic phonics have a better pronunciation of words that contain the phonemes they are learning. These students may mispronounce words learned in oral English class, but when we ask them to spell a word, their pronunciation becomes more accurate. This also affects their spelling, as they are better at identifying different sounds in words.

After laying a solid foundation in synthetic phonics, these students will not only improve their reading ability more quickly, but also make greater progress in vocabulary, speaking and writing. Compared with students who have not studied phonics systematically, they have obvious advantages in improving their English learning ability.