



Jolly Learning Ltd

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Background to Jolly Phonics

Description, and development of the materials

Jolly Phonics is based on the teaching methodology developed by Sue Lloyd and her colleagues at a school in Suffolk, in England. Through steady experimentation they were able to recognise that key features for high achievement in teaching reading were the teaching of the letter sounds (so not the letter names), and their use through blending for reading, and segmenting words for spelling. They then teamed up with Christopher Jolly, who had recently started a literacy publishing company, to publish the program.

The take up by schools came relatively swiftly, and continued over the years. By 2005, some 13 years after publication, 68% of UK primary schools were using the program. UK government policy was changed at this time, with the new requirement that schools should teach reading using 'synthetic phonics', as this methodology is now called. Similar advice is now given widely by governments around the world. The term 'synthetic' does not refer to artificial, but to the process of synthesising, or making, the spoken word from the letter sounds. The term was coined by a researcher into Jolly Phonics (Professor Rhona Johnston).

A key feature of Jolly Phonics is the engaging way in which each letter sound is taught. The students are first told a story which then leads to an Action, or motion. For instance, for the letter sound 's', they imagine they are all going for a walk, and then see something red, moving in the grass. It is a snake, which puts its head up, and says 'sss'. They then put up one hand, as if it is a snake, and say 'sss'. This helps teaching the letter sound 'sss', rather than the letter name 'ess'. There is a song for each letter sound, opportunities to learn the formation and practice it, and letter there are opportunities for blending letter sounds together for reading, and segmenting words (phonemic awareness) for spelling.

Today the programme has a very extensive range of classroom and student materials, including graded readers, whiteboard software, apps for students and for teachers as well as materials for use at home.

Jolly Phonics is used extensively around the world with most most private schools using it. In some countries the program has also been adopted by individual states (as in Mexico) or by the country as a whole (as in Oman).

The publisher also has a philanthropic arm, called Jolly Futures. This provides both materials and training in Jolly Phonics, at no charge, for state schools in countries in sub-Saharan Africa and the Indian sub-continent. Through this work, Jolly Phonics has come to be adopted for all of Nigeria, Djibouti and Gambia, for half of all of Ghana and Sierra Leone, for regions in South Africa and Kenya, and for significant parts of India and Pakistan. The early achievement of the children in being able to read and write as a result has been really excellent.

Evidence of Efficacy

Jolly Phonics is one of the most highly researched phonics reading program. All the studies into the use of the program have been independent, so with no funding or management by the publisher. The Jolly Learning website lists 27 studies which have been undertaken in 14 different countries.

A particularly thorough study was the one conducted by Morag Stuart in London Docklands, a low-income area. This published study (Getting ready for reading: Early phoneme awareness and phonics teaching improves reading and spelling in inner-city second language learners) is on the Jolly Learning website.

Over the first year of schooling, this study compared students taught with Jolly Phonics (JP) and those taught with Big Books (BB) and guided reading. The main finding in the study was about 'children in the JP group outperforming children in the BB group by almost one year in both reading and spelling.

This finding, of children taught with Jolly Phonics outperforming by one year, after one year of teaching, is supported by other studies, notably the study by Rhona Johnston and Joyce Watson in Clackmannanshire, and the study by Marlyne Grant in Bristol (both also on the publisher website). Put simply, the children in the Kindergarten year learned to read and write twice as fast with Jolly Phonics.

The Jolly Phonics case study can be accessed [here](#), and the article on how Windham Primary in ME has been using Jolly Phonics can be accessed [here](#).

Supplemental Services

Training in using Jolly Phonics is available in a variety of ways. Advice is given in The Phonics Handbook and the Teachers Book, as well as on the Jolly Phonics DVD. Such advice is thorough, and the basis for very many teachers.

A Jolly Phonics online training course is available, in American or British English. This is chargeable (\$99) and provides 20 hours of instruction over 5 modules. It includes email contact with a facilitator.

Separately, there are Jolly Phonics Trainers available to come and give training in-school. There are 12 such trainers in the US on the publishers website, and some 280 around the world.

The publishers website (www.jollylearning.co.uk) also includes teaching advice and a wealth of free resources.