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Synthetic Phonics method.

Implementation in a Spanish school

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Table of contents

| | |
|---|----|
| 1. Introduction | 4 |
| 2. Historical Background | 5 |
| 2.1. The United Kingdom..... | 5 |
| 2.2. English education in Spain | 9 |
| 3. Different approaches to phonics teaching | 12 |
| 3.1. Analytic phonics | 12 |
| 3.2. Synthetic phonics | 13 |
| 3.3. Mixed strategy approach | 16 |
| 4. Spanish school teaching English with Jolly Phonics | 17 |
| 4.1. Setting..... | 17 |
| 4.1.1. Characteristics of the school | 17 |
| 4.1.2. Characteristics of the students in each Jolly Phonics class..... | 17 |
| 4.1.3. Resources in the school..... | 18 |
| 4.2. Teaching aims..... | 20 |
| 4.3. Developing of the Jolly Phonics classes..... | 21 |
| 4.4. Example of a Jolly Phonics class..... | 23 |
| 4.4.1. First year of infant school | 23 |
| 4.4.2. Second year of infant school..... | 26 |
| 4.4.3. Third year of infant school..... | 28 |
| 4.4.4. First year of primary education..... | 31 |
| 5. Conclusions | 32 |
| 6. Bibliography..... | 34 |

El método Synthetic Phonics. Implantación en una escuela española

Synthetic Phonics method. Implementation in a Spanish school

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Abstract

Learning to read and write is essential for young pupils, in order to achieve correct communication skills. This dissertation focuses on the method Synthetic Phonics, and more specifically, Jolly Phonics, one of the most popular programmes in the United Kingdom. I will propose an analysis of the historical context and the different phonics approaches to teach literacy in the UK, and how this approach has been introduced in a Spanish school. Then, I will compare the practical development of the method in schools in the UK and in Spain, and how Jolly Phonics teachers value this programme.

Resumen

El aprendizaje de la lectura y la escritura es esencial para los jóvenes, para adquirir buenas capacidades en comunicación. Este trabajo se centra en el método fónico sintético, y más concretamente, Jolly Phonics, uno de los programas comerciales más famosos en el Reino Unido. Se propone un análisis del contexto histórico y diferentes aproximaciones para enseñar phonics en la clase de lecto-escritura en el Reino Unido, y cómo Jolly Phonics se introduce en una escuela española. Después, se va a realizar una comparación sobre el desarrollo práctico de este método en las escuelas de Reino Unido y España, y cómo los profesores de Jolly Phonics valoran este programa.

Palabras clave

Synthetic Phonics, Jolly Phonics, Literacy skills, teaching reading, writing.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is a fact that language is an important communication tool as the basis of all societies. Due to globalization, English has become one of the most important languages in the world, being also used as a 'lingua franca', that is to say, the language used for communication between speakers with different first languages (Seidlhofer, 2016). For that reason, it is crucial to teach English to young learners, since the early years to make them skilled and fluent speakers.

In this dissertation, in the first place, I am going to analyse how British schools introduce reading and writing in English to their students, which is acquired as their mother tongue. In a certain way, reading is going to be the main target to focus on, as it is introduced in their first day of school and they consider it vital for children.

It will also explain how English has become extremely important in the Spanish education system, developing bilingual schools, where English is introduced to teach the content of some of the subjects. In that way, the acquisition of the English language is necessary, not only for achieving the content of the subjects, but also for being a skilled speaker in this global world. Some bilingual schools in Spain are already introducing programmes of reading and writing that are used in British schools, trying to teach English to Spanish students in the same way. So the question is how these methodologies are developing in a Spanish school and whether this methodology is useful for Spanish children.

The methodology that I will focus on is Jolly Phonics, which is one of the most popular programmes used in the United Kingdom for teaching synthetic phonics in their classrooms. I will also explain how teachers in both the United Kingdom and Spain are assessing these proposals of teaching literacy, and whether this programme is useful for children with difficulties in learning.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The way to teach literacy has been evolving throughout the centuries, with different approaches. In this section, I am going to explain how reading system has been developing in the United Kingdom in the recent years, and how English has been taught in Spain.

2.1. The United Kingdom

Different systems of teaching literacy have been developed throughout the years. In 1989, The Department of Education and Science in the United Kingdom introduced the first National Curriculum into primary schools, due to the concerns about having a shared curriculum within England (House of Commons, 2009). During the first nine years of its implantation, the pupils did not obtain results that were good enough, so in 1998, Rhona Johnston and Joyce Watson, from St Andrews University, carried out a study about various ways of teaching reading and writing.

They compared three different strategies of teaching reading in Primary Schools around Clackmannanshire, UK. The first group of students learnt literacy by the synthetic phonics method, the second group by the standard analytic method, which, by that time, was the predominant strategy in the United Kingdom, and the third group used both analytic phonics and systematic phonemic awareness teaching without reference to print, that is to say, without handwriting.

The results were that the group that was learning by the synthetic phonic method was seven months advanced in reading and nine months in spelling, without writing, as compared to the other groups. In a certain way, the synthetic phonics teaching programme was considered the most effective one, especially if taught at the beginning of education. Nevertheless, the report that was essential to change the way reading was taught in the schools of the United Kingdom was Jim Rose's report (2006).

Jim Rose, responding to the request from the Secretary of State, wrote a wide range of recommendations for the teaching of early reading, focusing on the synthetic phonics programme. This report pointed out the great importance of developing early spoken

language as the foundation for a systematic grounding in phonics for later reading and spelling (The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, 2010).

In 2007, the National Literacy Strategy 'searchlights' model, the previous model used in the original literacy framework, was replaced by the Simple View of Reading. This new view of reading, that is included within the renewed Primary Framework for literacy and mathematics (2006), holds the idea that there are two main elements that are equally important for reading comprehension: decoding skills (or word recognition) and language comprehension ability. These two elements were first put forward by Gough and Tunmer (1986), as they said that reading is the product of decoding and comprehension.

The Simple View of Reading is sometimes explained in diagrammatic form. As Rose himself said in his report, 'a cross to emphasise that both word recognition processes and language comprehension processes are essential at all points during reading development and in skilled reading' (2006, p.77).

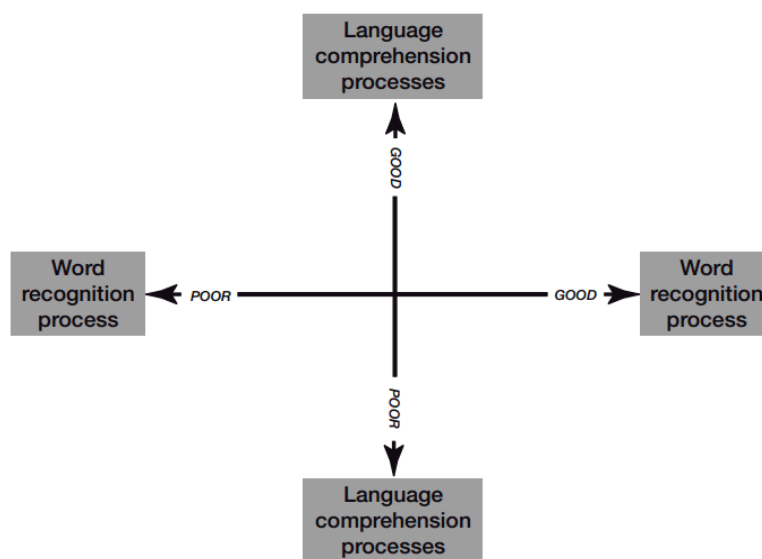


Figure 1: The Simple View of Reading (Source: DfES, 2006, p. 53)

In that way, this concept can also be expressed as an equation, where the same idea is shown: both word recognition processes and language comprehension are necessary to achieve reading comprehension.

$$R = D \times C$$

R = reading comprehension (ability to understand what you read).

D = decoding skills or word recognition (ability to recognise words and apply phonic rules, blending phonemes to decode).

C = language comprehension (process by which words information, sentences and discourse are interpreted, in both oral and written language).

Each of these skills can be quantified as a numerical value: zero (0) if you have no ability, and one (1) if you do it perfectly. So, if you do not achieve one of the skills represented as a letter, you cannot reach reading comprehension. In that way you will get zero in the equation. Therefore, you need to identify letters to be able to read them, and you need to understand the embed letters to understand the word sound and, in that way, achieve reading comprehension.

The Rose report advocates for a systematic programme of high-quality phonic work, based on a recommended synthetic approach, whose main features focus on teaching the students who are starting to be taught reading (beginner readers). These recommendations are: teaching in a very clear defined way and in a gradual sequence the grapheme-phoneme, which is the letter-sound, and their correspondences, which is the alphabetic principle; applying the skill of blending (synthesising) phonemes in order, which means putting together all the letter-sounds in a word in order to read it; applying the skills of segmenting words into their constituent phonemes to spell, and knowing that blending and segmenting are reversible processes (Rose, 2006).

Rose himself stated in his report that ‘the National Curriculum treats phonic work as essential content for learning, not a method of teaching’ (2006, p. 11). In other words, each school could choose the programme that they considered more suitable to teach that content, but they have to teach phonics. For that reason, in 2010 twelve schools were chosen as some of the best in England in being successful in teaching reading to their students. Then, the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills carried out a study about them, focusing on investigating how those schools carry out the programme of synthetic phonics, as their students have high standards in reading.

The success of those schools can be ascribed to the determination that every child will learn to read, and developing the skills of reading, spelling and writing consistently and persistently through systematic phonics (The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, 2010). In addition to that, they are also focused in the need that all children should read and write daily.

The United Kingdom Government has been deeply involved in education, as they tried to apply a better method for teaching reading, which ended being synthetic phonics. The Department for Education and Skills, in 2007, after researching and investigating, published a phonics resource called Letters and Sounds. This resource tries to provide teachers and practitioners a guide and some useful activities to know how to develop high quality phonics through different phases. They also decided in 2011 to give some economic help (match-funding) for buying phonics products or training to support the teaching. This match-funding was available for all state-funded schools, academies and Free Schools with Key Stage 1, which is the first division of four of The National Curriculum, that is, pupils from five to seven years old. These schools could buy anything they needed from the catalogue and they would receive match-funding up to £3,000 for a total spend of £6,000, so the Government would not provide funding directly to schools. In October 2011, schools received a hard copy of the catalogue of approved synthetic phonics products they could acquire. This match-funding was available until March 2013.

Since June 2012, there is an assessment test that every child has to take at the end of Year 1, which is the first full year of compulsory education in school, when the students are in the age of five. This assessment, called Y1 Phonics screening check, has the purpose to know if any student needs extra phonics help. It consists on reading forty words and non-words, which is a collection of letters that will follow rules, but do not mean anything, in order to see if the children know the phonics rules. The non-words are presented to the students as if they were monsters' names to avoid the non-sense of those words.

To sum up, nowadays, since synthetic phonics became an essential part of the National Curriculum in 2007, it is compulsory to use that method in each state school in the United Kingdom.

Seeing how British schools are teaching English reading and writing to their native students, other schools from different countries in the world are adopting the British method to teach reading, which is the case of some Spanish schools.

2.2. English education in Spain

Language instruction has increased its weight within the educational system throughout the years, being the ‘Plan Pidal’ in 1845 crucial to the beginning of the foreign language teaching in the school curriculum. This increase can be ascribed to the necessity of communication in the context of the industrial revolution, in order to improve the relationship between countries and make it easy to achieve successful commercial trades (Dirección General de Educación y Cultura, 2001).

The English language was first contemplated in the Spain Education System in 1970 with the ‘Ley General de Educación’, which was the first law that standardised the compulsory education and the foreign languages, introducing them in the basic instruction.

Since then, the importance of English in education has increased considerably, especially since Spain joined the European Union in 1985. For that reason and because of globalization, new social, cultural and economic contexts have been created (Ortells Ramón, 2013), so there is a necessity to get on in this globalized and interconnected world, and language is a key factor to achieve it. In this way, as Rafael Muñoz Zayas said, ‘Spain had to adapt itself to the community politics that tried to enlarge the teaching offer in European education systems, in order to reflect the European linguistic diversity’ (Muñoz Zayas, 2013)¹. According to those facts, languages became an international useful tool for communication, being English one of the most important, as it is considered in the different education laws that followed after the ‘Ley General de Educación’. In order to develop skilled speakers, a bilingual Spanish-English primary integrated curriculum was elaborated in 1996. This programme was the first agreement to develop a bilingual curriculum in Spain that was signed by the ‘Ministerio de

¹ ‘España, pues tuvo que adaptarse a las distintas directivas comunitarias que van buscando ampliar la oferta docente en los sistemas educativos europeos, con el fin de reflejar la diversidad lingüística europea’.

Educación y Ciencia' and the British Council, and which was renewed in 2013. It was carried out with the objective to provide a model of bilingual education since the early years within some state schools, in that way, this curriculum supports the learning between the ages of three to sixteen years old (Liberal Obanos, 2013).

Although the Spanish-English primary integrated curriculum is not followed by all state schools, their number has been increasing in recent years. It started with forty four pre-schools and primary schools, four of them being from Aragón, spread out on the three provinces. These pioneer education centres are: 'CP San Vicente' in Huesca, 'CP Las Anejas' in Teruel, and in Zaragoza, 'CP Fernando el Católico' and 'CP Hilarión Gimeno' (Liberal Obanos, 2013). Nowadays, in 2016, this programme is followed by eighty-four state pre-schools and primary schools, within ten Autonomous Communities, as well as Ceuta and Melilla (Gobierno de España). Among these bilingual schools, twenty nine are from Aragón (Esteban, 2011).

The aim that these bilingual schools pursue is learning the content of subjects using the English language as a way to acquire that content. Therefore, children are taught both content and language at the same time. Science, arts and craft and music are the most common subjects taught in English within these schools, but also physical education in some of them. Forty per cent of the school weekly schedule is required to be taught in English, to follow the Spanish-English primary integrated curriculum.

Since then, bilingual education has been spreading in Spain because of the great social demand. In 2013 the 'Programa Integral de Bilingüismo en Lenguas Extranjeras en Aragón' (PIBLEA) was elaborated to develop a bilingual education in this Autonomous Community. Not only many state primary schools and secondary schools are integrated in this programme, but also religious school that receive public funds (direct-grant schools), where English is one of the most resorted languages following these programmes (Ortells Ramón, 2013).

PIBLEA tries to expand the bilingual programme to all education centres along Aragón, in order to develop children's skills related to the languages: speaking, writing, listening, reading, and talking fluently (Liberal Obanos, 2013). It has two different categories. On the one hand, the 'Curriculo Impartido en Lengua Extranjera 2' (CILE 2), where schools teach two subjects in a foreign language (English, French or German),

apart from the specific foreign language subject, using that language as a vehicle to achieve the content. That means teaching 30% of its hours in the chosen language, usually English. On the other hand, the 'Currículo Impartido en Lengua Extranjera 1' (CILE 1), where the number of subjects taught in a foreign language has been reduced to one, so that means 20% of its hours in that language (Liberal Obanos, 2013).

Nowadays, there are two hundred and forty seven bilingual schools only within Aragón, but there are even more schools that are wanting to form part of these programmes, in order to offer a better curriculum to their students (Gobierno de Aragón, 2010).

3. DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO PHONICS TEACHING

There are different approaches to phonics instruction, which can be classified, related to the way we recognize words, as analytic phonics, synthetic phonics and mixed strategy approach (Lewis & Ellis, 2006).

3.1. Analytic phonics

Analytic phonics, which is also called global methods or look and say approach, teaches children reading, starting with the whole-word level and, progressively, breaking words down into more simple parts. In other words, analytic methods involve complex and meaningful linguistic units such as words, sentences or texts, and then, progressively, the students will get the simplest units, the phonemes (Lewis & Ellis, 2006). In this way, children are taught the word to avoid pronouncing sounds in isolation, for example ‘cat’ or ‘street’, and later analyse their constituent parts ‘c-at’ or ‘str-eet’.

Children identify (analyse), as Brooks said (Brooks, 2003, pp. 11-12), ‘the common phoneme in a set of words in which each word contains the phoneme under study’. In that way, children are shown some words, such as ‘pat, park, push and pen’, and the teacher helps them to analyse how alike these words are, deducing the common letter and sound within this set of words. By way of example, if the teacher shows the children the proposed words ‘pat, park, push and pen’, the students will have to pay attention to the initial phoneme and realize that they start with the same one, so if they hear /p/ sound, they will know that they have to write the grapheme ‘p’.

The use of graded reading books is common, and they are introduced using a look and say approach, which consists in teaching students words or sentences, usually making use of flashcards where these words are captured (Johnston & Watson, 2003).

3.2. Synthetic phonics

Synthetic phonics is the way of teaching reading starting with simple units like graphemes and phonemes, and then, progressively continuing with more complex units like words, sentences and texts. In other words, the method consists in teaching the grapheme-phoneme correspondence, which is the graphic unit (letter) with its sound, and then blending these sounds together to achieve the whole word. This method does not teach letter names until children know all the letters' sounds, that is to say, the letter sound /m/ is taught, but not the name of the letter in the alphabet 'em' (Lewis & Ellis, 2006).

Within this way of teaching reading, there is a variety of synthetic phonics methods offered by several publishers, such as Jolly Phonics, which is the most well-known method and has a wide range of materials; Phonics International, which is used with older children; Read write Inc., which is a method that is used for children from four to seven years of age and it is used by more than a quarter of the UK's primary schools, or Letters and sounds, which is a resource published by the Department for Education and Skill.

Among the different methods within synthetic phonics, the focus along this thesis will be on the Jolly Phonics programme. Jolly Phonics is a commercial programme that was developed by Sue Lloyd and Sara Wernhan, and published by Jolly Learning Ltd. It consists in teaching the English forty-two letter sounds by a multi-sensory method, including different actions and songs for each letter sound (Jolly Learning, 1987).

Jolly Phonics teaches children the five key skills for reading and writing, which are the following: learning the letter sounds, learning letter formation, blending, identifying the sounds in words (segmenting) and tricky words.

The first skill, *learning the letter sounds*, consists in teaching children forty-two letter sounds grouped seven books, which include alphabet sounds and diagraphs. As I said before, English has forty-two main sounds, but only twenty-six letters to represent those sounds, which means that sometimes two letters are put together to make a new sound. 'sh', 'th', 'ch' and 'ng' are some of these sounds, which differ from blends, as they have just one sound, whereas a blend has two or more (Lloyd, 1998).

In the second skill, *learning letter formation*, children are taught the correct way to write each letter, such as forming the letter in the air at the beginning.

The process of saying the individual letter sounds together in order to create meaningful words, is called *blending*. Children are taught to pronounce each letter sound separately first, to be able to combine them to form words.

The fourth skill that children have to be taught is *identifying the sounds in words* (segmenting), that is to say that students have to learn how to spell each word correctly. In this way, blending and segmenting words are reversible processes (Rose, 2006).

The last knowledge children have to acquire is the *tricky words*, which are the irregular words that do not follow the rules of spelling, such as ‘I’, ‘said’, ‘the’, ‘he’, or ‘you’ (Jolly Learning, 1987). In that way, children have to learn these words separately.

First of all, children are taught the sounds of the letters to make them fluent in reading and writing skills. The introduction of the letters follows a special order, which is not the alphabetical one. Instead of that, the order of the most common letters has been selected carefully, to let the children start to make words as soon as possible. In that way, the first group of letter that is taught includes ‘s, a, t, i, p, n’. Children can blend them to create many words formed with only three of them such as ‘cat, mat, sat or tip’. In order to prevent children from confusing letters, the ones which can get easily mistaken, are not too close to each other.

The letters are presented in groups of six, distributed within seven books, as follows:

1. s, a, t, i, p, n
2. c k, e, h, r, m, d
3. g, o, u, l, f, b
4. ai, j, oa, ie, ee, or
5. z, w, ng, v, oo, oo
6. y, x, ch, sh, th, th
7. qu, ou, oi, ue, er, ar

Figure 2: Letter sounds (Source: Jolly Learning, 1987)

Sue Lloyd describes in her book 'The Phonics Handbook' the way they develop Jolly Phonics classes. First of all, they propose a story, related to each sound, to introduce the sound. For example, for the letter 's', which is the first one, she tells the pupils that a child takes a dog for a walk in the country, and the dog starts to bark. The child hears a /ssss/ sound, and a snake slithers away. That story can be told in a personal way, but incorporating the sound to the tale, and the action of the sound, which in this case is weaving the arm as if it was a snake. Most of the times, teachers can also use toys or puppets to make children entertained or the 'Finger Phonics books' to show the children a colourful illustration of the storyline. All these approaches are used in order to introduce the children to reading and writing in a multi-sensory way.

Children are shown the letter from the Flash Card Sheets once they have learnt the sound letter. The teacher has to explain the correct form of the letter, making the pupils do the letter with their hand several times in the air. In that way, 'if the students form and join the letters in the air with their hand they find it much easier when it comes to putting it down on paper' (Lloyd, 1998, p. 21). Lloyd explains that after explaining the letter form and practising it, the children write the letter at the bottom of the sheet and then, they colour the picture that appears.

In the Sound Sheets both capital letters and lower case letters appear, however, only lower case letters are used at the beginning, avoiding using capital letters. The reason for using lower case letters first is because they consider that the font used, Sasson infant typeface, makes it easy to join the letters to form words, as they have joining tails at the end.

There are also some videos with songs about each sound, which are played after learning one of the groups of letters, as a reward for the children for working hard. They can also be used to review the learnt sounds.

In the United Kingdom schools it is common to learn one letter a day, as Sue Lloyd describes in her handbook, they take eight weeks to learn the seven groups of six letter sounds, and they take one week more to learn the main alternative spellings. However, it may take longer if the children are younger than five, or there are other special factors.

This programme is considered extremely effective for every child, and especially for those students with problems in learning to read, as the number of these students has been reduced considerably (Lloyd, 1998). Chris Jolly agrees with this, as she explains in SEN Magazine (2016) that with this method it is easier to find out whether there are any students with reading disorders.

3.3. Mixed strategy approach

Finally, the last approach to teach reading is the *Mixed strategy approach*, which consists in combining the two previous methods with all the possible variants. This approach is used with the idea of choosing the best combination of both, in order to achieve better results.

In that way, there are some schools that use the mixed strategy approach, combining the teaching of vocabulary of sight words with the teaching of the letters and decoding procedures (Everybodylearns, 2013).

4. SPANISH SCHOOL TEACHING ENGLISH WITH JOLLY PHONICS

We have already seen how English reading is taught in the United Kingdom schools and its effectiveness related to the previous programme of teaching reading. So, the question is whether the same methods can be used to teach English to our students in Spain.

4.1. Setting

4.1.1. Characteristics of the school

The state school that I am going to focus on is one of the pioneers joining the agreement with the British Council: ‘San Vicente’ state school, in Huesca. San Vicente is a bilingual school since 1996, integrating pre-school and primary school, so children are aged between three and twelve years. As it is a bilingual school, with an agreement with the British Council, it has forty per cent of its school day in English. It has, among other classes, literacy since pre-school, where students are taught to read in English by the synthetic phonics programme, Jolly Phonics.

4.1.2. Characteristics of the students in each Jolly Phonics class

Jolly Phonics scheme starts at the age of three, which is the first year of pre-school education in Spain. At this level, there are some children who have already learnt some vocabulary in English, such as colours or some cardinal numbers, but this feature is rarely to be shown in these years, as they usually speak in their mother tongue. The children have to be very guided in this level, so they have to be told what they have to do at any moment, such as ‘sit down in your chair’, ‘pick up your pencils’ or ‘start to write the letter’. In addition, the teacher has to repeat explanations and commands continuously, adding examples, and making use of any resource that can help children to achieve comprehension.

At the next level, second year of pre-school, pupils are more likely to have a more extended vocabulary in English, therefore, they begin to produce whole sentences,

though they are quite simple. At this level, pupils are able to copy and repeat the learnt letters. Children are taught blending at this moment, at the same time as they begin reading in Spanish. Easy and short words are taught at the beginning, such as ‘cat, mat, nap or pin’. The children at this age do not have to be so directed as in the previous one, as they already know, nearly everything they have to do. Nevertheless, it is important to pay attention to what they are doing and repeat everything many times.

At the third year of pre-school, children actually know more vocabulary and can produce longer sentences. They also have a greater mastery of the acquisition of the phonics sounds, because of the two previous years of phonics instruction. At this stage, they are able to write words following the learnt sounds and gestures taught in Jolly Phonics. Five and six-year-old children have already learnt many letter and sounds correspondences, so they revise the known letter-sounds and then, start with new sounds, introducing grammar and more vocabulary at the same time. In this level, students can distinguish more easily different sounds, doing many activities to foster this skill. Moreover, they are also more independent at doing the teacher-proposed activities.

4.1.3. Resources in the school

The materials that the school has about Jolly Phonics are, in the first place, the ‘Finger Phonics Big Books’, which are used in infant education, between three to five years old. They are a set of seven books in a big format, which makes it easy for the entire class to see them. These books contain colour pictures about the storyline for each letter sound, where the letter form and the action for each sound is included.



Figure 3: Finger Phonics Big Books (Source: Jolly Learning)

The Jolly Phonics Wall Frieze is used too. It consists of seven strings of pictures, containing six images per string, about the sounds they are learning. The frieze is stuck on the classroom's wall, so that students can see it and remember the learnt sounds.



Figure 4: Jolly Phonics Wall Frieze (Source: Jolly Learning)

With these resources, there is also a teacher's book, which contains some guidelines to use the materials and to acquire the knowledge about how to teach phonics.

In pre-school, many resources are used in order to provide a multi-sensorial approach. In that way, among the used resources we can find toys, games, computer programmes, and many other books. Everything pursues the same goal: developing reading and writing skills. The teacher can play in the computer the songs for each sound, showing the letter and the picture on the digital blackboard. These songs are from the Jolly Phonics resources too.

Apart from those Jolly Phonics resources, which are mainly used along infant school, there are other resources available. Flashcards are very important for all ages. There are different kinds of flashcards: some of them include only letters, and are used to revise the letter sounds or make the children blend the sounds to form words. There are also flashcards that include words, or words with images. They are usually seen in first of primary education to make the students read or for different games such as guessing.

In addition, the teachers also use other books according to the level of their students. In that way, for students in the first year of primary education, there is a collection of phonics books with stories for beginner readers called 'Read with Biff, Chip and Kipper'. These books are read in the class with the help of the teacher. At this level, the teacher does not follow any book in particular, she uses her own materials and other resources, such as the webpage 'www.starfall.com', where you can find many resources about different subjects, like science or maths, as well as reading activities.

4.2. Teaching aims

The main teaching goal pursued along the Jolly Phonics scheme is to develop fluent reading and writing skills. For this purpose, the first step is to acquire the forty-two different letter sounds that correspond to the twenty-six letters in English language. Furthermore, teachers try to speak to their students in English exclusively, in order to create an English environment and let their students be exposed to English continuously. In that way, the pursued aim for the teacher is to be able to speak with their students in English all the time.

Apart from that, in the first year of pre-school, it is necessary that three-year-old children learn the first three groups of letters along the books. Therefore, the letters' sounds to learn are: 's', 'a', 't', 'i', 'p', 'n', 'c', 'k', 'e', 'h', 'r', 'm', 'd', 'g', 'o', 'u', 'l', 'f' and 'b'. In the second year of infant education, children are taught the two following groups of letters, which are: 'ai', 'j', 'oa', 'ie', 'ee', 'or', 'z', 'w', 'ng', 'v', short 'oo' and long 'oo'. Therefore, at this level, children have to recognize the sounds integrated in the five first books of Jolly Phonics. They review the previous letters and then, they start introducing the new ones. At the next level, five-year-old children are taught the

last two groups of letters, so at this moment, they are taught: 'y', 'x', 'ch', 'sh', voiced 'th', unvoiced 'th', 'qu', 'ou', 'oi', 'ue', 'er' and 'ar'. In that way, students have been taught all the seven groups of six letter sounds throughout the Jolly Phonics programme.

In the first year of primary education, students review all the letter sounds learnt previously, doing activities or games to consolidate them, and to get recognize and distinguish each sound. Therefore, the goal pursued in that year is to make the children capable of identifying and distinguishing the different letters and sounds in both oral and written language.

Along these four years of education, the teachers highlight the great importance of talking to the students in English from the beginning of the first year of pre-school. In that way, they force the pupils to listen and learn English since these early years, as it is common that these children do not use English as their mother tongue or outside the centre.

4.3. Developing of the Jolly Phonics classes

Jolly Phonics scheme in San Vicente School starts at the age of three, introducing the first letter one month after the beginning of the first year of pre-school. Since then, the children are introduced a letter each week, letting consolidate the sound the rest of the week by different activities or games. In spite of that, there are some sounds that, depending on the level of the group, they take around two weeks to deal with or they delay their apparition in the programme and skip them to learn others before. Each new letter is introduced after revising the previous ones, so that there is a weekly revision, at least.

The introduction of capital letters and lower case letters is coordinated with the Spanish teacher, using the same process. In that way, capital letters are introduced at the beginning, and then, in four-year-olds or five-year-olds, depending on the group, lower case letters are introduced.

From the beginning, the teacher instructs students on how to write the letters with a pencil, giving them some instructions to do so: go up, down, and so on. However, the

graphics are not as important as the identification and association of the grapheme-phoneme.

Blending is not introduced until the second year of pre-schol, when the reading in Spanish begins. In this year, the pupils start blending simple words with no more than three letters in each word, such as 'cat' or 'mat'. Flashcards with letters are used for this purpose. In that way, the teacher points out at each flashcard with the letter sound to make the students say the sound, and then, she repeats the sounds quickly to say the word and make them aware about the blending skill. Moreover, she sometimes uses her arm to make them conscious about the combined letters: she stretches her arm, and she starts with the first sound, touching her shoulder at the same time, for the next sound she touches her elbow, and for the last one, her hand. Then, she repeats the letter sounds quickly to say all the sounds together into a word. The names of the students are used many times to make the students pay attention to the sounds in each one. In that way, the day one sound is taught, the teacher calls the role in order to ask the students to pay attention to the sounds in their names and say if these names have the learnt sound.

In spite of the fact that English teachers speak English in every class, vocabulary and grammar are introduced in an indirect way. That is to say, vocabulary and grammar are not introduced in isolation, they are introduced by means of different topics in order to force some structures or required vocabulary to deal with each of the topics. As for the tricky words, they are not taught in pre-school, so their acquisition is delayed until primary education.

Teachers make use of different games to involve the students in their learning. These games are carried out in order to develop reading and writing skills. More specifically, they are games about associating graphemes-phonemes, identifying phonemes in words, and so on. Within these games that the teachers use, the most common ones in their classes are bingo, noughts and crosses and hangman.

Jolly Phonics teachers from this school believe that this method helps their students with problems to acquire reading skills easily, due to the different learning suggestions that this programme offers: songs, gestures, sounds, stories, and so on. They reckon that it is a methodology which includes different learning styles, as there are many resources

to support the teaching. It is also believed that if the Spanish teacher carries out the same method, it will be really helpful for an effective learning.

However, the lyrics of the songs are not always understood by the children, because there are many words they do not know, as English is not their mother tongue. In a certain way, they sing the song because they are well-known, but they do not know exactly the meaning of what they are saying.

Jolly Phonics is an open resource, as teachers can change and adapt different aspects of it, such as the movements or the order of the learning to make it easier for the children to acquire the knowledge.

4.4. Example of a Jolly Phonics class

In this section, I am going to explain how a normal Jolly Phonics class takes place in this school, in each grade. According to the level that Jolly Phonics is taught, we are going to see four classes: first of infant school, second of infant school, third of infant school and first of primary school.

4.4.1. First year of infant school

As every morning starts with Jolly Phonics, the teacher begins with an assembly, in order to make them concentrate in the class. The Jolly Phonics teacher calls all the students to sit down on the floor next to her, on a kind of carpet. Then, she greets the students and asks what day it is and calls the student of the day. The teacher and this kid, start to call the roll.

In that way, the student sees the names of his classmates and, with the help of the teacher, the kid starts to say one by one with the proper greeting, that is to say ‘good morning’ and then the name of his classmate. The called classmate has to say the same, but with the name of the student that greeted him or her. Once, they call the roll together, they start to count the pupils who are in the class to know if they did it right.

Before introducing the new letter, which in this case was the vowel 'o', they revised the known ones with the songs. Therefore, the teacher plays on the computer the songs and then, she starts with the new one, but before listening to the song, she starts with the story about the picture that appears in the book.

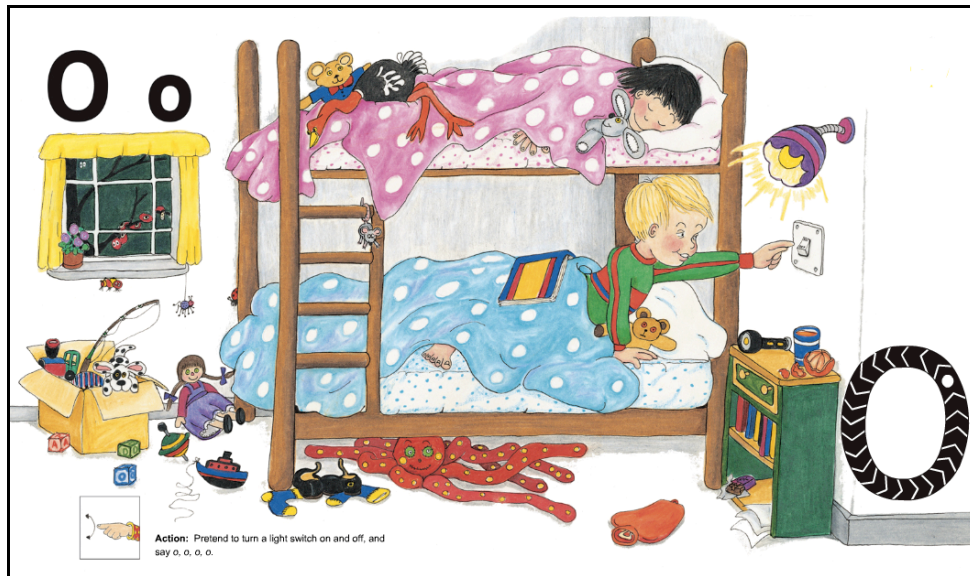


Figure 5: 'o' story Jolly Phonics (Source: Jolly Phonics, book 3)

Meanwhile, she starts to tell the story: a family moves into a new house, and their two children, a boy and a girl, go to the bedroom to sleep. The boy can reach the light switch from the bed and he plays turning the light on and off saying 'o o, o o, o o', until he stops and they fell asleep; the teacher goes to the switch of the classroom, and turns off the lights. Then, she tells the students to sleep, like the children in the story, doing many gestures to make it easy for them to understand what she is saying. The teacher turns on the light again and then, she tells the students to wake up, and again, she turns the light off and tells them to sleep. She asks if anyone wants to do 'o o, o, o' with the lights and one of the pupils agrees. Then, he does the action with the lights of the class, as the teacher did before. Later, the teacher asks another pupil to do it, and a girl does the same gesture of turning on and off the light, to make their classmates sleep or wake up.

Then, she asks the students to say more words with the sound 'o' and one of them says 'octopus', but the teacher has to say other things about the picture and asks the students if that word has the letter 'o', and they say yes or no. At this point, one of them

thinks that 'box' does not have the sound 'o', but finally, when the teacher says the word slowly, and he changes his mind.

Afterwards, the teacher plays the song twice on the computer, with the picture and the lyrics of the song on it. While they are listening to the song, they do the gesture about this letter.

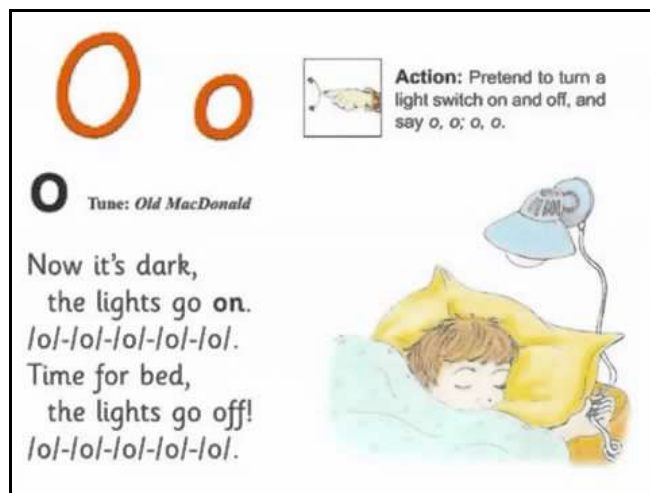


Figure 6: 'o' song Jolly Phonics (Source: Jolly Phonics, book 3)

Then, the teacher picks up a flashcard, which contains the learnt letter 'o', shows it to the students and says that they have another letter to stick on the wall, pointing at the wall with the rest of the letters. She sticks it on the wall of the class with the rest and then, the teacher tells them that they have already had many letters and they start to remember them one by one asking to the pupils. She says 'which letter is this one?' and then the children say the sound.

Once the children have said every sound, the teacher tells them to tidy up with a song. At that point, the children go to the bathroom, they eat their mid-morning snack and then, they go to the playground.

The worksheet of the letter has to be given another day of the week. That day, she starts the class with the song again and then, she shows the children the worksheet of the last letter, and asks if they remember the 'o', the on-off and turns the lights off and on again.

Afterwards, she makes them aware about the form of the letter by doing it on the blackboard and explaining how it is done. Then, she chooses a child and asks him to circle one of the 'o o' from the list of words the worksheet has, while she gives him a pencil. Afterwards, she chooses another pupil and does the same, until the children tell her that there are not more 'o' letters. After that, the children do the same with the grapheme of the vowel 'o' at the bottom of the worksheet, so they have to pick up the pencil one by one and do the letter properly.

In a certain way, she shows the children what they have to do then, so she tells them to sit down on their chairs, pick up their pencils and then, they start to do the worksheet by themselves. She also has to tell them to pick up some colour pencils to paint the pictures.

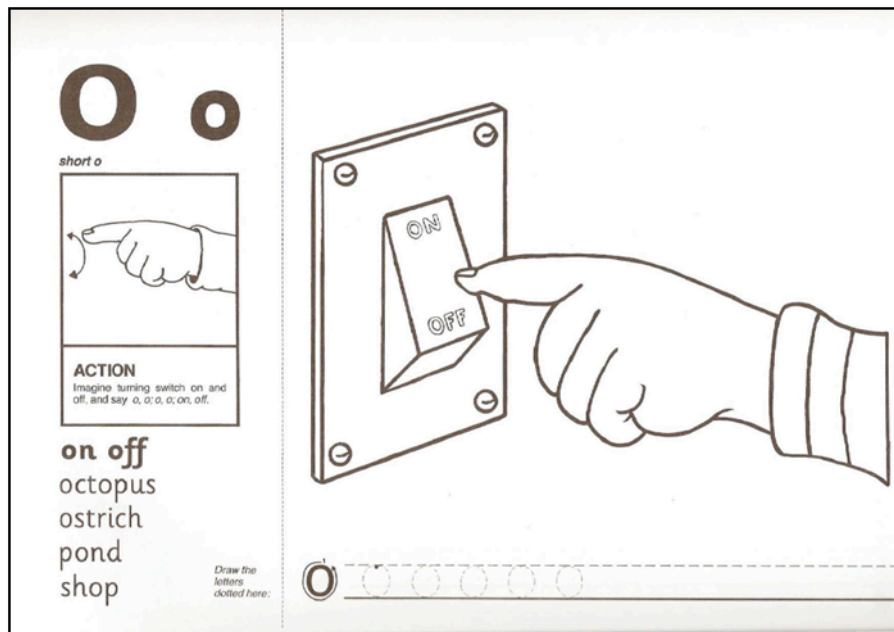


Figure 7: 'o' sound sheet (Source: The Phonics Handbook, 1998)

4.4.2. Second year of infant school

The teacher tells the students to take a seat on the ground next to her. The video about the phonics songs is projected on the whiteboard and she plays it to remember all the known letters. Once they have sung the songs and done the corresponding gesture, the teacher says that they are going to see another sound: the 'j' sound.

Then, she explains the story about a mum who has made some jelly, pointing at the picture related to this food. When the mum goes with the jelly to the table, the jelly does /j j j j j/ 'jelly', and the teacher puts her hand as if she is carrying a jelly, that is to say, pretending to carry a jelly and moving backward and forward. After that, she tells the students to do the same, saying /j j j j/.



Figure 8: 'j' story Jolly Phonics (Source: Jolly Phonics, book 4)

Afterwards, the teacher plays the song twice on the computer and meanwhile, they do the gesture related to this sound.

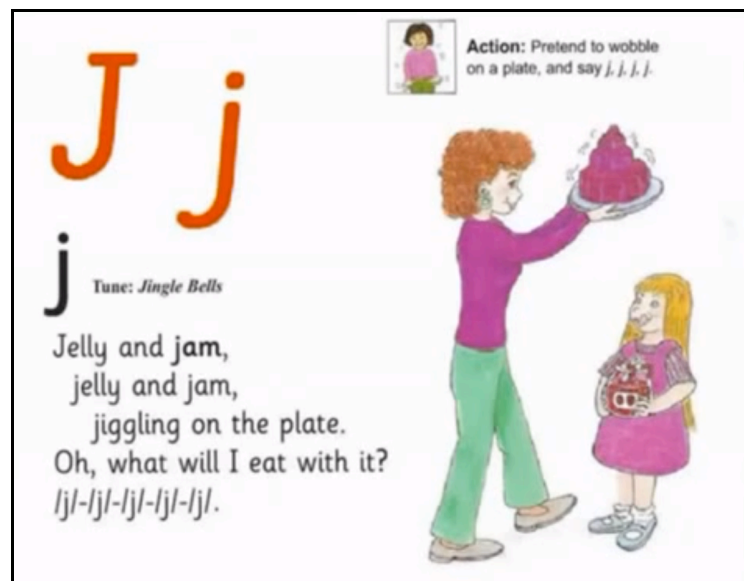


Figure 9: 'j' song Jolly Phonics (Source: Jolly Phonics, book 4)

Then, she shows the worksheet they have to do, letting them know how the letter is written. She says that they have to circle all the 'j' letters they can see in the list of words on the left hand in the sheet and fill the letters at the bottom.

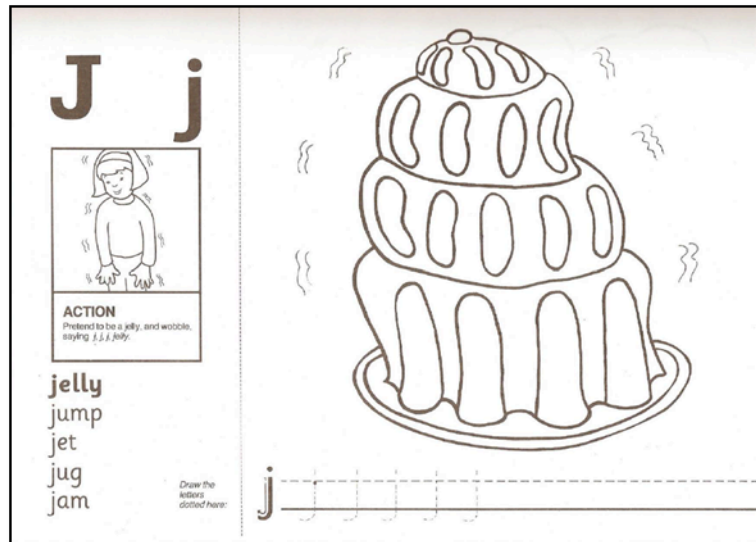


Figure 10: 'j' sound sheet (Source: The Phonics Handbook, 1998)

Afterwards, she tells the pupils to sit down in their chairs and she gives them the sheet to start with the work. They do the graphic, circle the /j/ sound in the words and then, they paint the picture.

4.4.3. Third year of infant school

The Jolly Phonics class starts with the students sitting on a room with no chairs. They are sitting on the floor and the teacher starts to revise all the previous letters they have already learnt, so she plays the songs on the computer with their lyrics.

Once they have seen all the letters, the teacher says that they are going to see another one. She shows the big book of Jolly Phonics and she opens it on the page of the new letter. The new letter is 'y'.

She starts telling a story about the picture. She says that there are two children who are very hungry, so they are eating a 'yyyellow' 'yyyogurt' and they like it so much, so they say 'yummy' 'yummy'. At the same time, she touches her stomach and she licks

her lips. Then, she tells the students to say what the children from the picture: ‘yummy’ ‘yummy’.

Then, she asks the students to guess about what they think the yogurt is made of, saying different fruits. She says: ‘strawberries?’ and the students say no, then ‘apple?’ and they say no. So she asks them which fruit they think it could be, and one of them says banana, another pupil says orange, and they start to say other words.

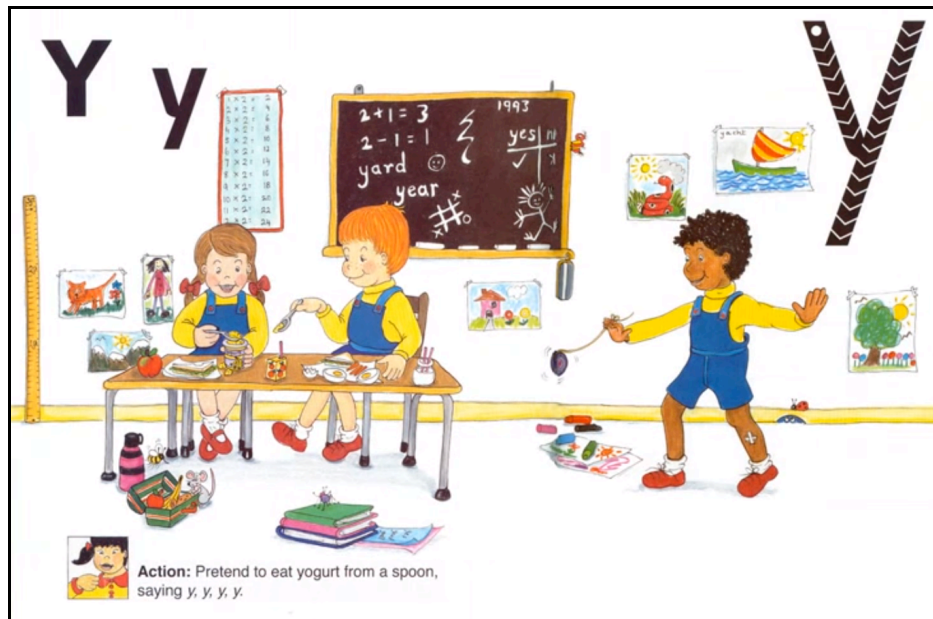


Figure 11: ‘y’ story Jolly Phonics (Source: Jolly Phonics, book 6)

Afterwards, the teacher says that they are going to listen to the song about the letter ‘y’, and she plays it twice. Meanwhile, the students and the teacher do the gesture.

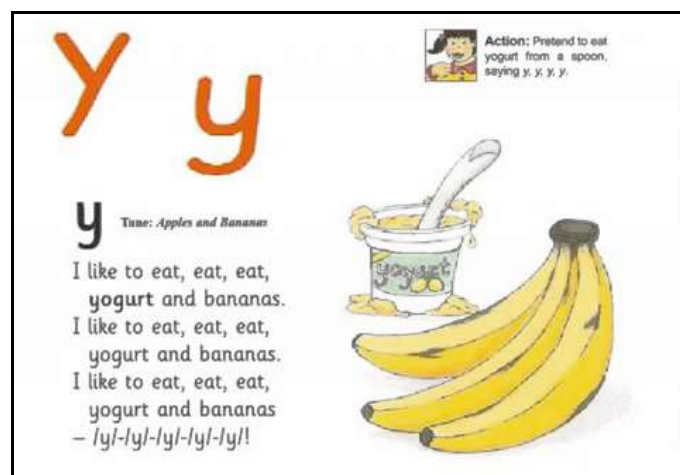


Figure 12: 'y' song Jolly Phonics (Source: Jolly Phonics, book 6)

Then, the teacher shows the children the worksheet and she tells them how to do it. In that way, she explains them how to write the shape of this letter and also asks them to circle all the 'y' letters that appear on the sheet.

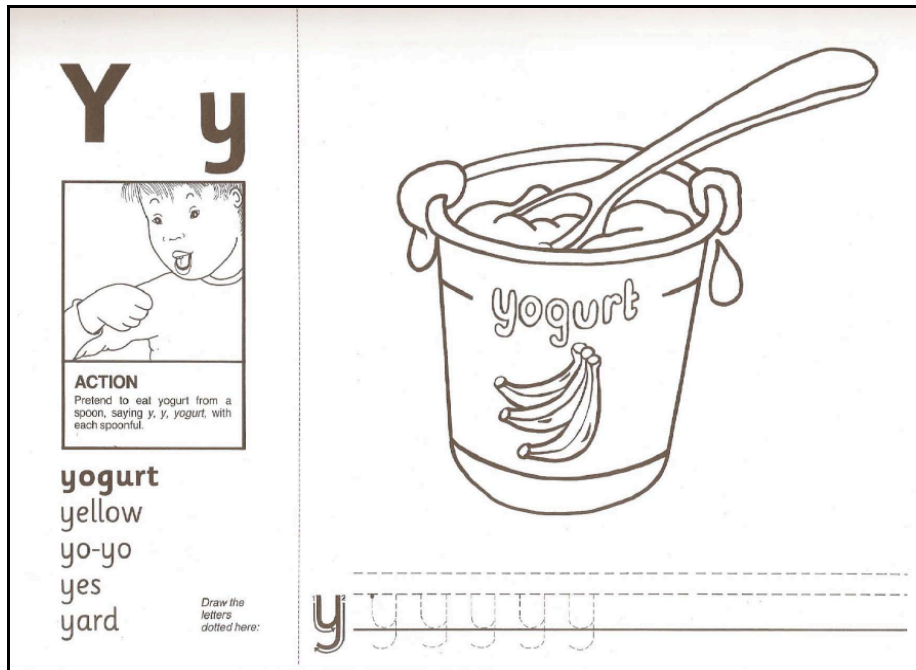


Figure 13: 'y' sound sheet (Source: The Phonics Handbook, 1998)

They do the worksheet individually and meanwhile, the teacher walks around the students' desks to see how they are doing it. Most of the students do not pay attention to a word with more than one 'y', and the teacher has to make them aware about that. While they are with the worksheet, the teacher plays some songs about phonics on the computer, and every child starts to sing, but without getting distracted from their work.

Afterwards, the teacher does a game in order to develop the blending skill. She chooses a girl from the class and she starts to do a gesture. The pupil says the sound of that gesture. Then, the teacher does another gesture and the girl says the next sound. After that, the teacher says the last sound of the word and she says the entire word. The teacher does the same with other students from the class.

4.4.4. First year of primary education

In first year of primary education, the lessons are different from those of infant school, as the teacher said that she skips the songs because the children find them a little childish and many of the letters are already known when they start in the first grade.

The class starts with all the students sitting in their chairs, instead of on the floor like they sometimes do with infants. The teacher writes on the blackboard the same phonics that they already know and asks one student to stand up and circle the grapheme corresponding to the sound she says. Then, she does the same with the rest of the students until there are no more graphemes to circle. She erases the blackboard and writes different words with different sounds. The students have to pay attention to the sound and then, one by one, go to the blackboard and circle the words with the sound that the teacher says.

Afterwards, the teacher introduces the ‘ar’ sound and asks them to say words with that sound. One child says ‘party’, and another one says ‘arm’, but the teacher says more words and asks them if they have that sound. Then, the teacher gives them a worksheet with some balloons drawn on it, in which they have to write a word with the sound they have just seen in each balloon.

Once the students have finished the worksheet, the teacher picks up some flashcards with different words and she calls one of the students to go to the blackboard. She tells the students that they are going to do a game. The game consists in guessing the word that appears on the flashcard, only with the help of the gestures that one of their classmates does. In that way, she tells the student to sit down in a chair, looking to his classmates and calls another pupil to do the gestures. One by one, they go out to play and in that way, the skills of relating grapheme-phoneme and blending are fostered.

5. CONCLUSIONS

As we have seen in the previous sections, teaching English has evolved throughout the years, both in the United Kingdom and in Spain. In the United Kingdom, Synthetic Phonics has been established as the best approach to teach reading and writing, seeing the higher standards and the reduced number of children with problems acquiring the reading skills. In Spain, schools are trying to develop English literacy skills, using the same methods, but with some differences in its development.

Within Synthetic Phonics, Jolly Phonics is used as the most popular approach to learn literacy. It integrates many resources, such as songs, gestures, and stories, trying to cover different learning styles. Therefore, thanks to the variety of resources, the number of students with learning difficulties has been reduced.

The set of information collected throughout this dissertation allows to make a comparison between the way of teaching Jolly Phonics in both, the United Kingdom and Spanish schools.

The first difference, related to this method of learning reading and writing, that we can find between the Jolly Phonics method as used in the UK and in a state school in Huesca is the rate at which a new letter is introduced: one per day in the British system, and one per week in the Spanish system. Thus, San Vicente School goes more slowly teaching letters to their students, because in most cases, English is not their mother tongue, so they need different attention.

Whereas British schools start at the age of five, Spanish schools start when the pupils are three, so they can dedicate more time to the teaching of literacy. British children are taught the first letter in their first day of school, in order to motivate them, while teachers from Huesca wait one month to let the students get accustomed to the school.

The type of letter used to begin to teach writing is also different, as in the United Kingdom they start using lower case letters while in Spain, upper case letters are introduced first. As previously said, lower case letters are first used in the UK because most letters have joining tails, so it is easier for children to notice the beginning and the end of each word. Conversely, the teachers from San Vicente school do not pay as much attention to the grapheme as the recognition to the grapheme with its phoneme.

Regarding the blending skill, the recommendation is to start at the beginning of the process, whereas teachers from San Vicente believe that it is better to introduce this skill at the age of four, after teaching the first three groups of letters.

Tricky words are introduced at different phases of the scheme too. British schools introduce them after the fourth group of letters have been taught, in contrast to the Spanish school that do not consider these words until primary education. I understand the difficulty of these words, but most of them are the most common ones, so it is important to teach them before they start to write sentences, in order to allow students to learn the spelling of these words.

Once a group of letters is finished, it is proposed, in the UK schools, to use the songs of every letter sound, as a reward for hard work. However, in San Vicente School, they play these songs in every class, in order to use this multi-sensorial approach, to review every letter. I have to highlight the fact that children do not understand all the words within the lyrics, so I reckon that the lyrics of the songs can be adapted to the level of the students.

Despite these differences, both teachers from the United Kingdom and teachers from San Vicente School in Huesca, believe that Jolly Phonics is a good way to teach reading, and that not only it is effective and easy to use, but it is also funny for teaching students and motivating them.

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