

In What Context Does “Superphonics” Work?

--An Analysis of the Practice in a
London School and the Possibility of
Application to the Japanese
Context--

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The purpose of this paper.

- To explore the possibility of applying “Superphonics” (also called the “Miskin Method”) to the Japanese context of English Education in maintained state primary schools.

Elmhurst Primary School in east London—its context.

- Most of the pupils come from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Somalia (so the pupil body includes many ethnic minorities, and it is an English as an Additional Language (EAL) situation).

Rough idea of the education system in England.

- Primary education

Reception (Foundation Stage)—ages 4-5.

Years 1-2 (Key Stage 1)—ages 5-7.

Years 3-6 (Key Stage 2)—ages 8-11.

What is “Superphonics”?

- *Phonics* shows children the connection between letters and sounds, giving them the tools they need to read and spell with confidence.

Superphonics is based on the method Ruth Miskin has evolved to teach reading and spelling to children at her own primary school, which she has done with remarkable success.

(*Superphonics Book 2*, Ruth Miskin)

“Superphonics” consists of 44 sounds.

- 25 consonants: f, l, m, n, r, s, v, z, sh, th, ng, c/k, h, p, t, ch, b, d, g, j, w, y, x (cs), qu (cw), nk (ng k).
- 19 vowels: a, e, i, o, u, ay, ee, igh, ow, oo (zoo)/oo (book), ar, or, air, ir, ou, oy, ire, ear, ure.
--which are called “speed sounds”.

(Teacher's Handbook, Ruth Miskin Literacy)

How is “Superphonics” taught?

- Step 1 Find the rhyming words: cat—mat.
- Step 2 Find the sounds: c/a/t.
- Step 3 Blend the sounds. The alien Phoneme Fred (3rd video clip) is useful here. Poor Phoneme Fred can only speak in separate phonemes—c/a/t—and your child will be able to help him to blend these into a spoken word.

- Step 4 Split the word into sounds.
Hearing the phonemes, and saying them in quick succession prepares children for spelling.
- Step 5 Read the word.
- Step 6 Spell the word.

(Superphonics Book 2, p.2)

Lesson observation on video clips.

- Video clips—Reception pupils in September (1st, 2nd and 4th video clips) and October (3rd video clip), 2005 (at the very beginning of the lessons in the new academic year).
- Easy to catch the underpinning concept/principle of “Superphonics”:
individual sound → sound combination
→ rhyming.

More than the underpinning concept/principle:

- Word pronunciation with an action (ex. hop, jump, pat)—TPR.
- Word pronunciation without pictures/realia—its context, in which English is used in daily life, plays an indispensable role.

Why Elmhurst uses “Superphonics”?

- Sound basis for literacy.
(...the national curriculum test scores have been rising each year since they introduced it.)
(*The Times Educational Supplement*,
January 13th, 2006, p.24)

Implications from the practices in Elmhurst
on its possible application in Japan.

- Flashback on the features of the practice.
 1. teaching a single alphabet letter and the equivalent sound first, and then providing its combination to enable children to read a word.
 2. teaching regularities between the sounds and letters (words), paying special attention to the rhyming words in a phrase.

3. introducing sounds and spellings at the same time.
4. reinforcement pronunciation/reading practice of the sounds, words and phrases by each child with his her partner.
5. the use of support teachers (teaching assistants) in the pair work.



Not allowed/possible to deal with letters in maintained state primary schools in Japan?

- According to the current National Curriculum (the Course of Study), pupils are supposed to learn Romaji in Year 4.



Conclusions.

- Possible to use “Superphonics” in our context:

For teachers, need to master only 44 sounds (should change Japanese way of thinking about alphabet). The alphabet should be connected primarily with the sounds before being recognised as letters; use of pair-work technique.

With the help of ALT (sometimes).