

## Q&A's by Emily Moorhead for

### Webinar #1 - *"Implementing Structured Literacy in the Kindergarten Classroom - Phonological Awareness"*

March 11, 2020

#### Implementation

➤ **How old should a child be when we start to teach them this?**

This is tricky; some children are ready before others. Generally, we can begin to play phonological games when the children are quite young. We can see toddlers enjoying rhythms and rhymes, and we can build on this natural playfulness with oral language. In general, in Kindergarten, we have little learners who may be as young as 3.5, and I say, have a go. With the little Year 1 children, I am careful to keep it short and sweet, to guide and support, and make a "mental note" of which ones are eager and wanting more, and which ones are not catching on. I will be ready to push a little more (as in, more intensively support and with increasing frequency and insistence) when these littles are Year 2. Many Year 1 children are ready to go, but some are not. Even when they're not catching on (the Year 1s) they often hear bits and take in something, so they are more equipped to join in as Year 2s. At the beginning of the year, when I assess which letters and sounds the children know, I can get a sense of how much my new Year 2s already know. Those who have not yet mastered many/any sounds hear them introduced again this year, as though it was the first time. (They get the full introduction all over again.)

➤ **So, you are saying that we start with teaching the sound, and not the letter in itself?**

I'm saying that the letter (the symbol) is attached to the oral/auditory sound – so I'm trying to establish that connection. So, I move from the auditory (sound) to the letter. I always name the letter ("the sound you're hearing is made by the letter 'P.'") but in order to get the sounds to connect to the symbol, I reinforce the sounds and symbols with less emphasis on letter name.

➤ **Would you do the hear, pronounce, recognize, print, apply all at the same time within one lesson?**

Yes, every time I introduce a new sound, I zip through hear/pronounce/recognize/print. "Apply" becomes more important once we know some sounds. It's hard to do much with only a couple of letters.

➤ **How long do you focus on one letter?**

Once I've taught a letter/sound I continually review it. We will use it in practice regularly to help reinforce it. If I can, I try to teach 3-4 sounds/week. I try to introduce a new letter and sound (or a new concept – we will talk about this in Webinar 2) most days. If children are having trouble remembering or keeping up, I'll pause and use a day (or two) to consolidate.

➤ **Do you have a chant for every letter?**

We only chant the short vowels. We learn the consonant sounds just as sounds. If needed, I'll use a keyword or a tiny picture cue to help jog a child's memory (I pencil draw the picture onto the bottom corner of the "code card" so it can be erased when no longer needed, or indeed, covered with my thumb while I'm holding the cards.)

➤ **Did you make your own letter rhythms? i.e. person with mosquito**

Some of the little memory hooks I use I made up; the children have also made some. Some were taught to me by colleagues or mentors (such as at The Reading Clinic, in Kingston). I just try to have some way to help children create a picture in their mind, and something I can use as a cue to help them.

➤ **How do you teach similar looking letters such as: b and d?**

I try to ensure they've got one before I teach the next one... for instance, I will teach several other letters between when I teach b and when I teach d. The letters don't sound the same, so I anticipate that children are phonologically able to distinguish them. Then I try to link my teaching to print formation. For instance, the b starts as a "sky letter" and we bring our pen down from the sky, bump the line, then bounce up and around the belly. The d starts with a "magic c" shape, then goes up-up-up to the sky before sliding back down. We giggle about b having a belly and d wearing a diaper.

➤ **How do you incorporate your phonics page seatwork? Are JKs and SKs placed in smaller, similar needs-based groups for this? Is this work you check off each day / week?**

We don't always use phonics worksheet seatwork. Many days, our "code time" is enough for many children. (They get some printing, some spelling, some reading during this time.) As the year progresses, and as children show that they could be (relatively) independent with a phonics seatwork tasks, these become more useful. I love to sit at the table with children while they work on this type of seatwork, and generally I invite a little mix of children to come to my table during centres time. This then becomes a way for me to assess children's phonics knowledge.

➤ **What are your thoughts about worksheets? What are the pros and cons?**

Worksheets can be valuable: they allow children to demonstrate their phonics knowledge independently and build paper-and-pencil work skills. However, worksheets can also be quite defeating for children who are already finding this work challenging. And worksheets in general don't fit with the "play based" model. I like to give children small pieces of worksheets (2-3 words to spell) rather than a whole page, until they start to ask for "work." And I like to support children working on worksheets, as an option or a follow-up. Then I can guide printing or pencil grasp or assist with work that might be just out of a child's independent grasp. I sometimes use a little slip of a worksheet as a task to complete following a guided group lesson, or as a tiny homework task.

➤ **If you are working with a whole group and you have SK students who have done the code before, how do you extend the learning for them?**

Two ways: First, I will often arrange my children's seating to allow me to turn my head one way to address part of the group (for instance, have some children write the sound /m/) and have the children on the other side of the carpet write the little word "map". Or children on one side write the little word "gum" while the other side writes "gum on the wall".

Second, it's important to note that some SK/Year 2 children may not have mastered the sounds well in their first year, so it is helpful, indeed essential, for them to hear the whole introduction again. Similarly, some JK/Year 1s come in with a great deal of phonics knowledge already. We take this into consideration when choosing seating for whole group, but quite frequently, we end up having two "large groups" (which are split by phonics knowledge, not specifically by JK/SK). Then one group has large group code time (which is more tailored to their needs) while the other group has writing, or centres, or quiet reading, or seat work... and then switch.

### Scope & sequence

- **Do you introduce phoneme level skills before earlier phonological awareness skills (e.g., rhyming, word counting) are mastered?**

Only playfully... Within the larger group, children overhear activities about initial sounds, or as I read aloud, I might make mention of listening to the alliteration or point out how those words ended with the same sound. But I recognize that different children are at different stages of their development, and we can't "jump the gun" or hop over these skills. As I see it, structured literacy is all about building a strong foundation. That can't happen if we skip essential building blocks. This does not mean, however, that children cannot start to learn the sounds and symbols.

- **Can you specify what order you would teach letter sounds in? If teaching short vowel sounds first, when would you suggest introducing long vowel sounds?**

I try to teach a short vowel, followed by around 5 consonant sounds. I begin by choosing consonant sounds that occur frequently, that are 1) easy to hear (long stretched sounds ("continuants" like /s/ or /m/) are easier for children to hear than short ("stop" like /t/ or /k/) sounds), 2) that don't look too much like other consonants, and 3) that are easier to print. I teach digraphs interspersed with single letters – more about that next webinar.

Once I've taught all the alphabet sounds, if children have shown good mastery of the short vowels, I might begin to teach long vowel patterns. Short vowel sounds are "slippery," meaning that they can get mixed up or forgotten when long vowel sounds are introduced, so I like to be sure my kids have really mastered the short vowels first. There is a lot of reading to do with CVC (consonant-vowel-consonant) words which are all short vowels. Children in Kindergarten who can decode CVC's well are in a great position for end of K.

A scope and sequence will be provided in webinar #2!

- **When do you introduce capital letters? Do you teach upper case and lower case separately?**

I often don't need to – many children know uppercase letters, we learn them as we go and as we learn to spell people's names, months of the year, etc. I find I'm usually trying to break the uppercase habit – trying to reinforce the use of lowercase letters!

➤ **Is there a problem with Jolly Phonics order of instruction?**

No, it's fine. I like to space my (short) vowels out more than the Jolly Phonics program, but that is a personal preference

## English Language Learners

➤ **Do I use the same technique if I am teaching English Language as a second language?**

I've had success with ELL students using this approach – although admittedly my schools have had a predominantly English-first-language population (however, in the last few years, I've had 5 students who are brand new to English, and they've all benefitted.) With English language learners, I try to make careful word choices to ensure I'm also building vocabulary.

➤ **Do the sounds come as easily for our ELL learners and in the same order?**

Certain spoken sounds that do not exist in a child's native language can pose difficulty, and it can be challenging for English language learners to discriminate some spoken sounds in English, so on occasion I will move a sound later in my scope and sequence if needed. Also, native speakers are much more able to ease into certain sounds (for instance, when the 's' in the word "is" sounds like a /z/, or when the /a/ sound is a little different because of the nasal /n/ following it in the word "van"). For ELL, we often must teach that sound specifically, where for native English speakers, they just accept it as equivalent.

## Assessment

➤ **Do you use any formal assessments or progress monitoring tools?**

I use a phonological awareness screener (Sound Skills, or the one created by Limestone DSB) and I assess which letters and sounds children know. I will quickly run through the "code pack" with children periodically – about every 2-3 months for sure. (I'm pretty conscious of which children are slower with saying sounds/spelling sounds during the large group... and when working with a small group, I keep an eye on which sounds are tricky/not yet mastered.) I re-assess phonological awareness (some) after the winter break in January, so I have lots of time to increase my intensity or provide more practice. I use their reading and writing efforts, and time with them working on phonics seat work to keep tabs on their progress.

## Other

➤ **What phonological awareness programs/resources does Emily recommend using in K-1 classrooms?**

Our Sound Skills binder has some terrific activities – however many need some prep. The thing that makes PA activities so fantastic as a transition and as a game is the very fact that I can do no prep. So often a word list of compound words, or of two-syllable words, or of CVC words is enough to use as a resource to play with words and sounds. The Primary Phonics series (particularly the workbooks) is an asset and a treasured collection.

➤ **Are you using the Orton-Gillingham approach? or you use your own method?**

I don't have Orton-Gillingham training (for example, through the OG Academy), or training in any specific method. The Reading Clinic trainers have OG training, etc., and I've taken what works for me from their beautiful mixture. I've read some research and done some thinking and slowly over years built an assorted method that works well in K/1. I didn't make it up, but it's a little jumble.

- **When you were first doing this, did you do all the literacy programming or did the DECE share it as well with your direction?**

When I first began using Structured Literacy in my Kindergarten room, we hadn't yet moved into the FDK model. So, in the early day, it was just me. I did a lot of whole group teaching then, because there wasn't another adult to assist in supervising or helping other children. I was in my third year of using a Structured Literacy approach before we moved to FDK, and I started doing more small-group work, then, and slowly added more whole group. My teaching partner got on board and began first with a lot of phonological activities (whole group and small groups) and later, with also using a code pack and introducing sounds. Because this is only a small part of the "whole package" of literacy programming, it was just something I did, while leaving lots of space for teaching partners to plan and implement other aspects of instruction and planning. As my partner(s) have grown to see the value (from evidence in our kids), they've become increasingly involved with teaching the structured literacy components and supporting and protecting established time in our day to ensure it happens.

- **Can we follow Emily on FB or Instagram?**

My Twitter account is more connected to my work.