

## Webinar Transcription: Answering Your Questions about Evidence-based Early Literacy Practices

Susanna Miller: Welcome to our guest speaker today. Emily Morehead is back today for the second part in a two-part webinar series. This part is entitled, Answering your Questions about Evidence-based Early Literacy Practices. In the last session, we collected all sorts of questions from the audience, and we've tailored today's presentation to those questions. However, if you have additional questions during the webinar, do not hesitate to put them in the Q&A box or in the chat function, and we will try to get as many answers as possible.

The Ministry of Education has provided funding for the production of this webinar. Please note that the views expressed in this webinar are the views of the presenter and do not necessarily reflect those of the Ministry of Education, or the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario.

We will also be tweeting live during this presentation, so if you want to join me in a conversation, you can find us on our Twitter page @LDatSchool or by using the hashtag #LDwebinar.

That takes care of all our housekeeping today. We're just going to get right into the presentation, but first I'd like to welcome our presenter for the day, Emily Moorhead. Emily is a teacher with the Limestone District School Board in Kingston, Ontario. She's been teaching early primary children for 17 years. It wasn't until her own child showed signs of difficulty in learning to read, though, that she recognized that like her son, there were consistently children who were leaving kindergarten unprepared for reading success in grade one. At that point, Emily became deeply engaged in her own learning and teaching practices to ensure that every child has the tools to become a successful reader. Emily, please take over the presentation and let us know what you have for us today.

Emily Moorhead: There we go. Hello, I'm happy to be back again, and we'll get started right away. I'll share my screen with you so you can see the slides, and we'll get started straight away. There we go. Today's presentation is answering your questions about evidence-based early literacy practices, to follow up to the one we did before, and so lots of the information shared this time is directly linked to what we did before. I haven't really pulled all that information forward, so if you're not sure about something, please feel free to ask or check out that other webinar.

In today's session, we'll explore the flow of a typical day in my classroom. We'll consider the effects of COVID-19 on early literacy learning and how that's affected our kids that we have now who are year-ones or who have never been to school before and who did not have school pre-COVID, and also our year-tuos who have had now two school years that have been impacted by COVID. We'll look at a couple of little case studies. One is a child who has some articulation difficulties, and we'll take a look at that and how that affects the way we approach the student for learning. The second case study will be specifically about dealing with motivation in early readers, so kind of getting that ball going. Once those children are starting to be in place, we want to be able to help them feel motivated and glad to get going on that reading. Finally, there's time at the end for any other questions that you may have.



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I used my Bitmoji today, and this one always made me giggle because I always think there isn't really a typical typical day. What it might look like; but you never know, someone might find a bird's nest on their way to school, or they might lose a tooth first thing in the morning and it may throw the whole day a little off-kilter and that's fine. We know, those of us who work in early primary and very, very early years education, that you never really know what's going to happen. We go with the flow and try to flex around what happens with our kids because we want to be responsive and we want to make sure that what they experience in their day-to-day lives is valued and important for us too.

We'll take a look at just this general idea. When we're planning for early literacy instruction, we want to plan to have that direct instruction. We'll look a little at what that means when that's happening. There are lots of questions about how much time is being spent and how it fits together in the day. We'll take another look at screeners and assessments and when we use them and which ones would be good choices. We'll talk a little more about setting appropriate goals for our children's literacy learning at school. We'll also talk a little more about routines that work, so whole-group instruction and small-group guided instructional groups. We'll look a little at early interventions and how we can support our kids with the materials we use at school.

Here we go. This is the what and the when and the how much questions. They come up a lot. I certainly don't think that what I do is the be-all and end-all but it does seem to work, and we do have lots of children who have lots of success with their literacy learning at school. The what is really about that direct and explicit literacy instruction that is planned and systematic and cumulative. It's not on the fly and it's not incidental, it's not while we're reading a book and we notice a spelling pattern, that we're going to dig into and talk about a little more. It's really carefully planned. I already know what letter and sound I'm going to be working on and what letters and sounds have already been taught, so that I can really choose my words carefully and choose little phrases and sentences carefully that my kiddos can decode and read, or encode to spell and write the whole thing correctly if I've given them words that don't have any sounds that they haven't been taught yet. I'm careful about that so that I'm really building those skills, and I'm really teaching them that those letters and sounds are linked together and when we can hear all of the sounds, we can use that knowledge to help us read those words and spell those words accurately and correctly, and really, really be reading the words and not taking guesses and not taking chances on that. When does it happen? All day long. Our days are busy and filled with literacy activities throughout the day. It does not mean that it's fully instructional all the time. We have little short, targeted instructional sessions, typically 5 to 15 minutes is about the max that we would have, and we have lots of student engagement opportunities within those. Our kids are often using their fingers to count the sounds or standing up and touching body parts to count sounds and words. They often will have a whiteboard or a chalkboard on their knees, or they sit on it so that it's not in the way, but they can pull it out really fast and use it. Those are ways that we can keep that engagement going. Children often will have dots that they can move on a whiteboard or magnetic letters or something that helps them feel and move around those



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sounds as we're going. The activities tend to be fairly short, fairly quick. I've chosen my words ahead of time, so I'm not having to ponder and think about, "What's another word that has AY in it?" That doesn't really tend to happen. I've got a good little list inside my head and good books if I need them, or Google if you really need them, to be able to pull some letters and sounds and words that you could use and some little phrases and sentences that you can use as well. We have lots of opportunities for practice with feedback, so that happens in the whole-class setting. We'll do a lesson and I'll give words, and I sit just a little above them. Not flat on the floor with them when we're working on this work, but up a little higher so that I can see the whiteboards or see the chalkboards that are on their knees, so I have a really good understanding of what kids are doing and how quickly they're getting those letters and sounds put down on their whiteboard or chalkboard. It's a little trickier with masking. We will talk about that a little later, but when we're looking at those letter sounds and having children say the sounds, sometimes it can be a little sneaky to really know what sound they're saying really clearly. That's a time that sometimes really requires that small-group instruction, especially when we know our kids who have some articulation needs anyway. Our whole literacy time throughout our day is interspersed with play. We'll take a look at that sort of loose typical day in my class so that you can see that there's lots of opportunities for open-ended play and lots of opportunities for children to be really creative and do what they want and think about whatever they'd like to learn about, but also there are these little tiny parts of our day that are very directed and they're very, very pre-selected so that I can control that, and I can make sure that everyone is getting that level of instruction that they need. Lots of opportunities for self-directed learning. Some children are really keen and they want to know more and they want to do work and they want to practice spelling even when it's playtime, and other kids would like to play with blocks and would like to play with the train and would like to do a painting and all of those things are okay. There are lots of times for social activities at school and snacking outdoor activities happen throughout our day, and they're not mashed down with instructional time. Nice and short. How much? About 5 to 10 minutes, typically. We can get up to about 20 minutes with some active engagement. The length is really flexible. These lesson instructional times are flexible in the sense that at the beginning of the year, we might be two to five minutes at the most when we're just getting started and we're learning how to sit and learn as a group, and we only know one or two letters, so it doesn't take us very long to whip through the sounds we know, but as the year progresses and children have built up some stamina and some skills, it may take a little longer, but they also feel really successful and they know what to do, so it doesn't feel tedious for them. Often, sometimes have to split our kids into two groups. We've got quite a large class this year, and so we might say these people are staying on the carpet to do their code meeting right now and other people are going to come and do it after. When we do that, the children who are moving on to something different for a while will often say, "Oh, I just want to stay and watch. I'll just sit at the edges." They're very keen, they want to learn, and it really is a positive experience for all of us. It's fun for me to teach, and it's fun for them because they have lots of activities that they get to do. Also, they just feel really successful with that work, so it's kinda great.



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Take a little look at screeners and assessments that I use. There were questions about beginning of the school year and what happens then, and then what other assessments and things happen throughout the school year. We'll start first with that beginning of the year. I always like to do a basic alphabet knowledge. It's just quick and dirty. It's uppercase letters and lowercase letters, and we just look to see what letters and sounds children already know. Do you know this letter name? Could you tell me the sound it represents? For some children, they can whip right through and they know lots, and for others they don't know any or they know very few and that's okay. It just gives me a good understanding of where we're starting so that we aren't making any assumptions about what children might know or not know, and we're also not wasting time reteaching things that they have already learned or mastered. That beginning of the year only has 26 uppercase and 26 lowercase, but if children know most of those or all of those, I'll sometimes tuck in just with a pencil at the end and say, "What would happen if you saw C and H together?" They might know that sound, or, "What would happen if you saw I and G? Would you know what that would say?" Sometimes they do. It's important for me to just keep pulling back and finding out exactly what they know so that I can make sure that I'm giving lots and lots of instruction right at that sort of targeted level where they need it. I also do a phonological awareness assessment or a screener. David Kilpatrick's PAST is fine. It can be tricky for our little littles and they don't tend to progress all the way through, but that's okay. It's just a starting point. Then the PASS is the same, it's the same idea. It's a little bit, I find for my littlest ones, a little bit friendlier. Our school board has made a phonological awareness screener as well that is also-it's short and quick. That sometimes is enough for me in the fall as well. Those screeners can be really hard for some kids. It's important that we keep that time really positive and light and chatty so that it's really it's not taking a really long time and it's not feeling really taxing for them, and it just gives us an understanding of how they're progressing with those skills so that we know where to begin. Observational oral language baseline. This is really just knowing who they are and knowing how their oral language sounds at the beginning of the year. Can I understand them when they speak? Do they have articulation needs that I need to be aware of? Do they seem to understand me? Can they follow basic instructions, one step, two-step? Do they follow everyone else, but they don't actually seem to know? Do they face and listen when I'm reading a story or when we're talking together, or do they turn away or need to be directed to face me? Can we engage in conversation so that they have that sense of a back and forth conversation that could happen with another person on a topic that they're interested in? I'm not looking for them to be able to tell me everything they know about writing necessarily. It might be, if they're very interested in trains or they're very interested in spiders, could we have a conversation about those things? Could they tell me about their family? Could they tell me about what they did on the weekend? Those kinds of activities that just give us a sense of whether or not they're able to communicate their own knowledge easily or well. I also always ask families if anyone in their family has a history of speech and language needs or of difficulty with learning to read. Those are just basic knowledge for me to know so that I can be prepared. Those tend to be red flags for children who may struggle with learning to read. If I know that, that certain children have a family history of dyslexia or reading difficulty, it gives me that knowledge to get started right away and pay close attention to that little person so that they don't fall through the cracks for a while. They



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often can sound very, very literate and very chatty, and their oral language can be very, very rich. Sometimes it can be easy to miss some of those earlier warning signs that they're actually struggling quite a lot. Ongoing throughout the whole rest of the school year, I do both formal and informal screeners and assessments. I check their code knowledge or their phonics a few times throughout the year, and often that actually just sounds and looks like me with the code pack that I use. It's just a bunch of little cue cards with letters on them, and we just can whip through them. If I've taught them, I will check to see if they've mastered those. If I haven't taught them yet, I tend to leave them off once I'm going through that later in the year. I would probably do that kind of a screening about three or four times in a school year. Always before report card time so that I can make sure that I'm giving families the most accurate and up-to-date information about what the phonics knowledge their children have. Also, periodically just to check and make sure that we're on the right track. If I have kids who are seeming to lag a bit, who don't seem to be holding on to that information as easily, I'll do that check way more frequently, like maybe every two weeks, week to two weeks, so that I really make sure that the instruction that I'm providing is targeting those skills and those needs. I'll check their blending and segmenting on the fly. That's their phonemic awareness, so if they can blend two sounds or three sounds, if they can segment two sounds or three sounds. That happens every day in our regular activities and outside activities as well as inside activities, and so I have a pretty good sense of where children are. That's quite informal. I also will have another go with those phonological awareness screeners that I did in the fall, generally December or January, and then again afterward kind of in around there so that I have some time still. If I notice at that point that children are not keeping up or are not making gains as much as I would hope, I still have time to do something about it. I still have time to provide a more intensive program for that child or those children between March break and the end of the school year, and it doesn't feel like I've waited so long that now I just have to send them on their way to grade one knowing that they're struggling with those skills. It's important, I think, to screen early enough that you have time to change your programming and support those learners. I practice and I screen and assess for their decoding skills to read little words and encoding skills to spell little words. That can be also just within our code meeting. Sometimes it's just we might read and spell several words, and some children can do that really easily and others seem to struggle more, and so that's quite anecdotal, but it does give me good information. Then I do a fluency assessment a couple of times a year, and that I've been using the DIBELS assessment, D-I-B-E-L-S. It's free, it's online and it's quite useful in terms of getting a good picture of how children are doing in terms of being able to blend little three-sound words and two-sound words and being able to read. They need to know letter names, they need to be able to blend three sounds to read little long words. It's timed, so it gives me a good idea of how many sounds kids can rhyme off really quickly to make sure that we're on track. There is a nice cut-off line, so you can tell when children are lagging a little slower than they ought to so that we can start to provide that intervention then.

Really important to know that not every child will be a reader by the time they leave us in kindergarten. It's important that we have good and solid goals for our little people. We want to make sure that we're moving our kids forward, we're identifying where they are and what they



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know right now, and then we're making good strides to move them along that path. We want to notice who are finding it more difficult. We don't want to just carry on with our instruction forever, for a long time, and not start to take note of the children who don't seem to be picking it up as easily as others. Those children are showing us with their actions that they're having a little harder time, and we want to make sure we provide some interventions early, timely intervention so that we can really help to get that child on the right path. If they're not keeping up with our regular instruction and the other children are, that's a good clue that they're lagging a little behind. It doesn't mean they're falling behind. It does mean they need a little more support. If no one is keeping up with our regular instruction, it means we're trying to go a little too fast and we need to back that off a bit. Because we need to recognize that all of these little folks are just trying their best and are here to learn. We need to make sure that we're providing what they need so that they can be successful.

You may recall from my last session that I said my end goals for the end of two years of instruction in kindergarten would be that children would know 26 letters, so they're short vowels, and one sound for each consonant. They could know a few common digraphs, CH, SH, TH, WH, CK, maybe. They can blend three sounds to read CVC words. Those are always going to have that short vowel, and they're going to have a couple of consonants in them. They can do that pretty flexibly in terms of which consonants are in there, and they can read them quite easily. They may occasionally have to check them and say the sounds one at a time, but they also likely are able to sort of start to pick that up and blend them fairly quickly. I often have to challenge kids to start to say the sounds inside your mind and see if you can just tell me the word right away, and many of them can do that. Then the same without segmenting. We want them to be able to segment three sounds to spell CVC words accurately. There are some who will not get there or who may not get there yet and that's okay, but those children are children we've got to keep a close eye on because we want to make sure that we're giving them the instruction they need so that we can help move them along. That instruction, and particularly in smaller guided groups or in one-on-one situations where we can really, really target that instruction and really give lots and lots of feedback to really support those learners, is often a great way to get that happening. When we're talking about children in kindergarten, we know that the gap is actually quite small still from the children who know letters to the children who know all their letters and who can do all of those things that are on my end goals. Still relatively small. We're not talking about children who don't know any letters and children who can read Harry Potter for the most part. We're in that little middle ground where they're still just working on single sounds and blending a few sounds together, and so it's not a giant leap to get them moving along that path, as long as we get going on that instruction.

My goals for students may seem a little lofty. They certainly exceed the expectations in the Ontario Kindergarten Program, but with direct and explicit instruction that is systematic and sequential and cumulative and is diagnostic, so I'm checking to see that children are catching on and holding on to that information and then tailoring their instruction, these goals are very achievable. When we don't spend our time teaching kids to guess, when we don't spend lots of



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time teaching them about Picture Power, or we don't spend a lot of time getting them to use their eagle eye to look at the picture and think what word might make sense; when we're taking that time back and using that time really effectively for really, really careful instruction that's really cumulative and provides that support, most of our kids can get there. We really want to get on with that job of giving them the tools and the skills so that they can read and spell, and then it doesn't seem very lofty at all. Many, many of my year-one students this year and every year are already able to do all of those things that I've said are goals for the end of two years of instruction. Very regularly, I have students who are well beyond that by the time they've had two years of instruction here.

Let's take a look. There's no pretty way to show you the flow of my day, but we have a balance day here. We have 100 minutes of instruction and then snack time and recess time, and then another 100 minutes of instructional time and then another snack and recess, and then a final 100 minutes of instruction. That's the breakdown of our day. We have routines that happen throughout our day that are really consistent. In the morning, that first block, we have a playful PA start. That means before we even come in the door, we do some phonemic awareness activities outside. It's active and fun and funny. Depending on the kids' moods and how busy they feel that morning, we will make it more playful or less playful. We have stumps in our yards, and the kids might stand on their stump and then jump off when they hear two words that rhyme. We might start at the wall and if I say two words that begin with the same sound, you get to run to the other side, and if I say two that don't, then you have to stay where you are. We'll do a whole-body touching the sound. Can you tell me the three sounds you hear in the word hoop, and they might touch their head for the H and their belly button for the OO and their knees for the P, and then blend that word back together 'hoop' I might do robot language words, so I'll tell them the words M-A-P, and they have to tell me what the whole word is and then they get to move ahead. Lots of activities like that that just give us lots of outdoor time that's still lots of moving around and lots of giggling and fun, but it's also working those phonemic awareness skills. Those progress over the course of the year. I don't have a program that I use because it's quite responsive. Often when we're out there, I might get a theme of words. I might do only vegetable words, or I might do only different kinds of vehicles or whatever, just so that I can keep thinking of words really quickly, and it keeps children's interest engaged because they're trying to guess what word might come next. Often at this point in the year, I have little ones who say, "I have a word. Can I do my word?" If we're doing depends on the words and it depends on the kids, but sometimes we might be doing, "Okay, tell me all the sounds you hear in the word bird," and they'll say, "B-ur-d, bird," and that sounds great. Then, "Can I have a turn?" Then it will be, "Tell me all the sounds you hear in rhinoceros," and we'll say, "Let's try rhino." We sometimes have to trim them down a bit because they're actually really long and really complex words, so that would be too many body parts for us, but they're engaged and happy with that kind of work as well. That's happening before we even make it in the door. When it was really, really COVID days, we actually did our code meeting outside as well so that I could pull my mask down and show them what my mouth was doing periodically and then pull it back up, and we could be distanced enough. In our classroom it was really hard to have that kind of distance, and so we did mostly



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use that outside time for that kind of work. We used to joke that our kids would learn to read and spell faster than anyone else because their fingers were so cold in the wintertime when they had to take a mitten off to hold a piece of chalk, and then you have to pull their mask down or like remove their scarf so that they could say those sounds out loud for us. It was an ongoing joke with our kids, who were learning to read and spell outside like that, that they were going to learn really, really quickly because they didn't want to freeze. The next little bit of time when we come inside is this oral language soft start. It's play, it's very relaxed. The children know what they're allowed to do and most things are open. Not the really big things that take a long time to tidy up because it's not a very long time, but it is a time to chit-chat with each other. We'll sit in the hallway for a few minutes and chat with people while they're changing their shoes. We're giving children lots of opportunities to engage in oral language activities with us that are gentle and friendly and fun. It's a nice way to flow into our day. It's soft and friendly. Doesn't feel really pressure-y, and it doesn't put us in a situation where children are all sitting at the carpet waiting for the last few struggle-y kids so that we can get going on our instructional time. Many times we have books out or writing tools out so that kids can choose that kind of literacy activity while they're having that time, and they will very happily do those activities. Then we have our literacy meeting and it's 5 to 15 minutes. It's not very long. This is called our code meeting, so we're actively working now on our phonics and our phonemic awareness and working those skills together. It's very interactive. This is a time when children often will come in and the whiteboards will already be out and they'll sit right onto them so they know-we often say, "You're going to sit on your whiteboard like a bench," and so that they're ready to go. It takes some of the time of distributing the whiteboards later if they're already on there. I hang onto the markers until it's time because I find that we do tend to draw on things and write on our legs and write on the carpet if we have those markers ahead of time. We want to keep that really quick. Anita Archer, my favorite, says to keep that instruction at a perky pace, and we really do try to do that. We whip through saying our sounds really fast, all the sounds that we've already learned, and then I turn those cards around and I will say sounds, and children will pull their whiteboards out to get ready to write down the way to spell those sounds. That's really fast and really fun. I regularly will have words already on the whiteboard, or I'll have words on a chart, or we'll have words that we need to sort. Sometimes we'll do just a blending drill, so we might put two sounds together and just blend the sounds, and sometimes it makes real words and sometimes it doesn't. Once we can do two sounds, we can move on to three, but we're building those skills slowly, slowly, slowly and adding layer upon layer. I try to teach about three or four sounds a week, so we really do clip along quite quickly. As long as kids are holding on to those sounds, we just add another one the next day. They know the routine really, really well. As I said before, that meeting does get a little longer as we know more and more and more code because we can actually do more words, and we have to start to read some little phrases and sentences, so it's not as quick as just saying those sounds or blending two sounds together. Once we're starting to blend four sounds together or read a little phrase or a sentence, we have to have a little extra time for that, but by then the children know how to do that so they just gobble it right up. As I've said a few times, that time is interactive. There's lots of time for children to be moving things around or to be up and touching body parts or marching, or whatever those things that let us get some movement



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into that activity as well. Again, it's short and sweet, so 5 to 15 minutes, typically. We often will put a timer on and see how fast we can get our way through our code pack. That gives us that impetus to move, move, move and keep clipping along. We know that we aren't taking forever. No one wants to sit there for that long, so it's a perfect way to sort of crank it up. One thing I forgot that I had done, but I put little stars next two times within our day when we might have a guided instructional group happening at the same time. If you'll notice the next one is literacy task. Sometimes it's writing and everyone is working on writing. Sometimes it's spelling and children are doing differentiated tasks that let them work on spelling. That might include working on PA activities. Our littles might be sorting words or pictures that have different beginning sounds and they have to sort them by beginning sound. They might be practicing some print formation with a grown-up with them, and they may be playing little games together. We've had times this year already that our kids, the whole class, all tucked in at tables at the same time playing a game with a partner. It's a read and roll, so you read the little strip, and then you roll the die and you get to move or go fish with a partner, and you read, "Do you have the word let?" "Oh, no? Go fish." Those kinds of games that are actually children all reading at the same time are able to happen in kindergarten with this kind of instruction because our kids know those letters and know those sounds, and they know how to blend sounds together to read little words. That time is often a time when either myself or my teaching partner are pulling a little group of students who need some more direct instruction or need some more support. That little small group may happen then. There's a little play time as children are finishing because there is that transition time as some writers are still writing and other writers have finished really quickly, and so we transition really smoothly then to blocks or books or puzzles. It's not everything. All of the play is happening at the carpet, so the children who are still working can continue to work and not be really distracted by the play that might be happening around them, but as they finish they can flow over to that. Typically, we'll support those children who are still working and get everybody over there for that few minutes of playtime before we transition to the next thing. Our children who are really, really fast start to have more lines on their paper so that they're not scribbling out something really quick and moving on play, but they are having time to do some work. Then we have a content learning meeting. We have two of those throughout our day, and they're Math or Science or Social Studies, typically. Sometimes social emotional learning as well happens at those meetings. They're a great opportunity to read a big book together, or right now my class is learning about rocks, and so we are reading a book about fossils, and we've been working our way through it over several days and really rehearsing that information so that we've got a good handle and we're building that knowledge about rocks. Children leaving this afternoon found rocks on the yard and said, "I found one rock that I know is sedimentary because it has stripes on it." Really, they're quite knowledgeable, they're little sponges, and we want to feed that knowledge because what they know as youngsters really will support their ongoing comprehension of text as they get older, and we want to keep supporting that with that knowledge. We want them to know things so they can understand what they read going forward. We have a little PA phonemic awareness game to transition to hand-wash. It might be at the beginning of the year, there may be some phonemic or phonological awareness activities. "If your name rhymes with Payden, you can go," and children are able to listen and then go. It just moves



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things along, and it continues to activate those parts of our brains that are working on building those skills up. Then we have a hand-wash and a snack, and out we go for our outside time.

After that outside time, we have extended outdoor play, and we sometimes will do guided groups outside as well. We typically will stay out for an extra 20 to 30 minutes. Depending on weather and how things are going, sometimes children are starting to ask to go in, but sometimes they're really content and happy and we can stay out even longer. We have a couple of little picnic tables and little stumps and spaces outside that we actually can tuck up and do some more instruction outside for the little ones who are looking for a little something to do. It certainly isn't mandatory. We would not pull children away from an activity that they were really happy with, but sometimes they're looking for things. If we pull out some clipboards, they're clamped around us to get us to help them with some writing or help them with some work. Those are times when we can easily, easily get a little extra instruction in. Often, those little ones who are a bit struggle-y are quite happy to do some work outside with us as well at that time. When we come in, we have a little tiny, short meeting. It's about 10 minutes, some kind of a community circle idea where we just go over anything that cropped up when we were outside, or how are children feeling and what's going on. It's just a nice check-in time. It's short and sweet, doesn't take very long, and it just gives us that little reset before we get going. Then we have our indoor play, and it's another 30 to 45 minutes. It's another big, long stretch. Some small groups are happening at that time. That's a time when I often will do some individual direct instructions. That's a time when I might pull one or two children one at a time to really look closely. Those are children that I've noticed have been lagging a bit, and I often will have said to them, "Seems like this is a little hard for you. Would you like to work on it with me?" Generally, then the answer is yes. Again, I won't pull children away from something they're really engaged with because sometimes something amazing is happening at the block corner and that's not the right time to say, "Oh, no, you have to come and work on your reading," but I will make sure I get those kids. That tidy-up time is another time that we really sometimes will use. Those kiddos who are finding it the very hardest are often the kids that I will get to do a little tiny, tiny one-on-one time with me when it's tidy-up time. They're missing something they maybe don't really totally love, and they're also working on something that's really hard for them, so that feels like a nice pay-off for them. We do a quick little gather with some songs and stories, short and sweet. Again, our carpet time is little. Sometimes children's stories come up and that's a time when they can share something interesting that they did at playtime. We've had children who wanted to sing a song for us. We got Apple Bottom Jeans the other day from a little person who decided he needed to sing for the class by himself, so that was quite comical. Then again, off we go to wash hands and have lunch and go back to outdoor play. That wash hands time again, we may use that same idea. Sometimes, we have children reading each other's names to call who gets to go next. Those kinds of things that still embed that little bit more literacy time within that little transition time that otherwise just goes to waste. Finally, we get into that third block of the day, the children are getting tired. The teachers are getting tired. I have planning time most days at that time. That's often our gym time or our drama, or dance time. Typically, a story happens then as well. We've had a read-aloud or two in the morning and then another one that happens then. We have



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another little content learning meeting. Again, that might be math. It might be science or social studies. If it's a math learning time, we'll do our little math job right after but there are often many options for that. The math job might be a paper and pencil job if you choose that, but it may just as easily be using unifix cubes to write the recipe for making a smoothie and choosing the red cubes represent the strawberries and the blue cubes represent the blueberries and the white cubes represent the bananas. You can make your smoothie and tell me how many of each you need to use. Those kinds of activities have lots of play within them. There's also a layer of writing that goes on at the same time because we want our kids to keep having those pencils in their hands and working away. Sometimes those end-of-the-day jobs are also reading a book with a grownup or playing a game with a grownup or with another partner. Our big buddies come at that time of day as well. Sometimes we'll do activities with them. Again, it's not very long, short, and sweet, and it just is a little job so that they feel like they've got something to take home. It might be a little crafty activity or maybe different things set out on each table for them to have a go at, lots of choices, lots of flexibility. Then we prepare for the end of the day. We have a little more oral language time, a few more little chats. Anything people have to share, if they want to tell something that happened to them or tell us about when their tooth fell out, that's a good time for that, and we do a quick review of the day just to remember and have in our heads, what happened all day and what we worked on and what we learned so that when we go home, we can share that information with our families as well. Off we go see, you tomorrow, out the door.

Routines at work. Routines give us structure to our day. Our kids know what to expect. If they come in and see a whiteboard sitting on the carpet, they know to sit on it. That takes some time at the beginning of the year but it really saves a ton of time later on because it does give kids that sense that they know what's coming and they know what to do. When we were virtual, it was really useful because the children would know the routine of the code meeting so well that they'd start to see that meeting was happening, pause the video, run and get what they needed and come back, and engage as though they were in person. They knew that routine so well. To keep that routine really familiar, they know the games, they know the way it works, they know what we're going to do. Then we just change the content to keep adding more and building up those skills. We try to teach with reciprocal skills. We're teaching, reading, and spelling back to back. Tell me the sounds of these letters. Now, I'm going to tell you the sounds and you're going to write them down. We want to build those two working together because that's really powerful and really helps to speed up that processing as quickly as we can. We do decoding and encoding the same thing. Decode across the word and blend the sounds together or segment that little word and spell those letters down. The same with that listening and speaking. We want to practice both of them. We want to have kids using both of those skills really simultaneously. We create that schedule and then we try our best to stick to it. Sometimes we have to adjust it and that's okay, but it is really useful for the kids to know, with a visual schedule, they start to know it in their own heads and they can tell you what comes next, but that's really useful for them. It keeps us on track and helps to make sure that the little small groups that need to happen or whatever make they do happen because we don't get waylaid by other things. Of course, there



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will be times that we have to throw all of that out the window and do something really different and wonderful because the opportunity presents itself, but we need to be sure that that routine is where we fall back so that we can keep it, ensuring that our kids are learning, and not starting to lag back because we've stopped the intensity of our instruction. Then the other thing is that we really want to increase support when we notice that kids are struggling. We want to increase the intensity of our time with them. We want to try to do a few more letters or a few more words or push them a little bit more. To keep that going, we might increase the time that they're spending working on tasks. Often, that time one is hard for the little ones, but that frequency is not. We can keep that meeting really short, but then have two more little tiny, tiny meetings throughout the day with just that child or with a very small group so that we're still getting lots of repetition and practice in but it feels fine and funny and it doesn't take very long. We can actually provide our own interventions in those ways. We can just increase those things and we can start to pull the kids who really need a little extra, to have a few extra minutes with us, and when we are shiny and happy personalities we can share that with our kiddos too. They can start to feel really empowered by that time and often I'll try to pre-teach something that's coming up for them so that when it's time for that whole lesson, that whole group lesson, or that larger group lesson, they feel they already know it a bit. If I can say, "Oh, I wonder who could tell me what sound is at the end of the word soup," and we've practiced that one already in that small one-on-one or that very small group. They've already tuned in for that one and they can probably pull that from their mind and they feel really proud of themselves to be able to pull that information back forward.

This is more chatty now because there's a whole bunch of things on one slide. Where do we start? It's useful to have a scope and sequence. There are lots available. You can look online. If you have a phonics program within your school already, it's very useful to use the scope and sequence that comes with it because then the materials will match up to it quite nicely and that's really helpful. Unless there's some real reason that you don't the scope and sequence that goes with the phonics program that you have in your school, if you have one, that's a good place to start. Phonological and phonemic awareness, as we said, they happen every day. Those are activities I don't have a program that I use for those. I know a general idea of how that's going to develop so I know that beginning sounds are easier for our kids to hear, so I start there, and when I'm seeing that most of my kids are really successful with that, the ones who are still struggling with that become a little small group, for some extra work and extra support for that and the rest of them will start to move onto that ending sound. We don't need to keep practicing beginning sounds. Once children have mastered that, they're ready to move on. It's important to do that. Then, after that ending sound and they've got a good handle on that, then we can move into those vowel sounds in the middle and keep working on that as well. We just keep clipping along. If they can do three sounds really comfortably, can we stretch to four? Sure, we can. Those are the kinds of things that we can do so that we can make sure that that instruction is moving forward, with or without a program. I don't have one and I just go ahead and do my own thing and it's been fine. If you're really unsure, there are programs available. I can't really endorse one over another because I really haven't ever used a real phonological and phonemic awareness



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program for myself, but they do exist. If you're feeling nervous about how to get going on that, there are programs available that can help with that. Decodable materials, the same thing. There are lots. I write a lot of my own stuff early on so that it only contains what I've already taught. Lots of words, little phrases, little sentences, and then we can start to combine those sentences to make our text a little bit longer. By the time my students are reading multiple little sentences, I don't need to write my own materials anymore because they have got enough code that they are able to clip through some little books. Those little book books are great for that lot, all of them. Some of them are sight words and they're a little harder, but those early ones, the beginner reader ones are decodable and quite nice. I don't use a phonics program either, I created my own scope and sequence which I tweak a little bit now and then, but I tried to just figure out what was logical in terms of being able to get kids going as quickly as I could. Small group instruction, like I said, those are my intervention groups. I don't see all my small groups every day, but I do have some children that I do see every day. Word families is a really interesting question and it comes up a lot. My general belief about word families is that, if children know all of their short vowels and they know all 26 letters, they mostly don't need to learn about word families because they can blend across three sounds and they can read those words. Instead of trying to remember more little chunks then, the a, an family and the of family, and the if family, they can actually just say those three sounds and blend them together. I don't worry very much about word families, the only exceptions of that are those units that I think I talked about in the last webinar and that's ing and all and old and ink. Then I tag on -ing and -ang and -ong and I'm also changing the vowel sound by keeping that same -ng sound that doesn't feel like something we can say in English without a bowel attached to it. Those ones are useful for us to learn as a little family so that we can read those really fluently. Home reading, I typically send games, often just games that I've made, so a blank board game, and I'll write in the words that the kids are able to read, and then they can take that home. I'll send little zip lock bags with words on little strips, or little phrases, and sentences on little strips. If they never come back, oh, well, and if they do come back, then I'll switch them, and give them a different one. When they don't come back, it's not really upsetting, because I'm not giving books, and books, and books away that don't come back, and so it's not a huge big loss if I have to chop another page or two and put them in another zip lock bag so that they can go home. That's a way that I've been able to get families on board, and kids on board with reading at home, and really by the time they can do most of those quite fluently, they're able to start to move into other things that their families might have at home. If you're wanting to learn more, there are lots and lots of books available that are a great start, and lots of podcasts, and webinars, and things that you can start with, and have a go from there. Really, I think if you can do a few little things, a few of these activities, or really create a few little routines that support this kind of learning, what you will see in the growth that happens with that will drive that instruction forward. We did five minutes and that made a difference. Let's try 10 minutes, or let's try two little sessions of that, or whatever, and just building those up does get that moving along quite nicely. It will give you that feeling of, "Ooh, I better keep doing a little more, because it's really working, and it's really changing the way my practice feels."



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Every time I see a new slide, I say okay. The effects of COVID, and lack of instructions. We know the last few years have been really hard. That's me with all my PPE on at school. We know there have been lots of really difficult things that have happened because of COVID, and because of the way instruction has been impacted by COVID and by school closures, and by lockdowns.

It's important that we recognize that those things are real, and our kids need us to provide a level of instruction that we may not have necessarily needed to do before. When you think about what we're seeing that are new, or different things, the effects of stress on our kids, on our families, that up-in-the-air feeling when we don't really know if we're going to be in lockdown, or we're going to be at school, all of those things have an impact on our kids. Isolation. Not only being in isolation for a while when you had COVID or you were waiting to find out if you had COVID, but also that isolation away from other people away from play dates, swimming lessons, and birthday parties. Some of those things really give our littles opportunities to develop their oral language and develop their social skills a bit. They've not had those experiences in the same way. It's important to keep that in mind so that we create those opportunities within our classrooms and our schools. The lack of instruction for some of our kids is really critical. It's important that we really make the most of the time that we have with them in person, and online if we have to, so that we're really providing the very best instruction we can because it can reach out through that screen, or reach out in our classrooms, and raise them up, and give them those skills that they maybe don't have. One of the things we're seeing a lot is that muffled underdeveloped articulation. Sometimes it's that they have a mask on, or that they're chewing on the inside of their mask, or licking the inside of their mask all the time, and that's making it hard to understand them. It also can sometimes make it so that we don't know for sure if we can understand them because they've got that mask on, they sounded a bit quiet, and they sounded a bit muffled, and we're not as sure, because we can't see what their mouth is doing in the same way. That can be really tricky, and it's important that we recognize that articulation is going to make a difference for our kids. One of the things I said earlier was that we did a lot of our instruction outside in the fall, and last year because we were able to pull our mask down and show what our mouth was doing, and really make sure that our kids could see what our mouth was doing as well. It's important to think about the effects on oral language development that have happened because of COVID. For some children and some families, it's been amazing because they've had more time with their adults at home, more time to read books, more time to chat, and more time to do activities together that perhaps they didn't have time for before, and they've really built up their oral language. For others, they've been quite isolated, quite struggle-y, and their oral language may really have suffered because of it. Fine motor and pencil grasp is another area that I'm really seeing as a big difference for our kiddos. They've got lots of fine motor skills for doing little things, but they haven't spent a lot of time with chocolate crayons or pencils before they came to school, and so those things, I think, are important for us to keep trying to give them opportunities to have little writing tools in their hands and practice with that, even if it's not looking like much when they start. The idea of the Matthew effect, so the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer. When we're thinking about our kids with language and literacy. That gap is wider than it's been other years because the families and children who were able to provide lots of reinforcements



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and lots of supports and have lots of books around, those children have had an easier time. With families that had an easy time with access to the internet so they were able to engage with online school, those children had an easier time progressing along and maybe not so far behind. The children who have struggled through all of that didn't have those same opportunities, they are further behind than they have been other times. It's important to really be mindful of that and try to pull that gap together by doing really careful instruction and making sure that we're moving our littlest ones along.

What do we do? We recognize that it's a problem. We meet our kids where they are because we can't change what's happened and we can't change what they know so far, but we can make sure that our instruction is moving them forward. We do our best to keep teaching with urgency. It feels, especially in the fall, we've got so much time. That time happens over days and days and days that we actually want to keep that moving along. We can't just wait and leave it and watch and see what's going to happen. We actually want to use those little 15 minute instructional times to really be urgent about what we're doing and really purposeful so that we're making sure our kids are getting the skills they need. We use our opportunities when we've got them when we're in person, when we're outside, those times when we actually can pull the mask off or when we can engage with our little ones to really make sure that we're giving them. We recognize that the kids who need us the most need us to give them that little bit of extra time and attention and energy so that we can make sure that they're getting what they need from us. When we're using direct and explicit instruction, we're most able to tackle those things.

We're getting close. I feel like I've been talking forever. It's quite warm in my room. Case study number one, is this little person. This is my son, Aiden, and he is now a teenager. This is a sweet little near and dear picture. It was him on his first day of junior kindergarten. He had some tricky articulation when he was small. He could say many sounds, but at some sounds that were a little muffled. He had a really difficult time with saying words that had blends at the beginnings or at the ends. His phonemic awareness was a little shaky, partly because of that articulation. He would say "tana" when he did something amazing, and he meant "tada." No matter how many times we've tried to correct it that isn't working out of him. He was just a happy little person till he went to school and learning to read turned out to be quite difficult for him.

How can we support these kids with articulation needs? We need to know who they are, and we need to recognize them fairly quickly. Sometimes families will tell us, straight up, "He's already been working with a speech-language pathologist, and he's already working away with that." My goodness, I'm getting close to the end, but I'm not leaving much time left over for questions. We need to know why it's hard for them to learn. We need to recognize that they're at increased risk. I'm just going to talk faster. Sorry. We need to provide direct instruction for these kids. When we're introducing new letter sounds, we're going to show them what our mouth is doing. We might pull out a mirror so they can see what their mouth is doing. We'll be really explicit. When we're working on that L sound, we'll tell them, "Take your tongue and touch it up behind your teeth." There, we really are clear about what we're doing. We're providing lots of opportunities



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to practice with that. We'll seek help from our speech-language pathologists or CDAs, and their children's families if we need to go that route.

Okay, quick and dirty. There's lots here. Slow down and give them a chance to understand and really check that they're understanding before we keep moving on. Really listen to these kiddos because they often then become quiet and withdrawn and they don't tell us all the things that are in their minds, because it's harder for them to get it out. It sometimes can make us feel a bit impatient as we're trying to get those sounds out. It's really important that we really go at that and give them opportunities. I often will tuck into the hallway with a little one who's difficult to understand, so that there aren't other distractions and there aren't other voices around. It's really important for us to be able to hear them. We want to be really explicit about that articulation so that we're helping them learn. We are not trained speech-language pathologists, of course, when we're teachers, most of us, and it's important that if we need more support, we ask for it, but also that we can do some work about what's happening with our mouths so that we can give children that little extra boost.

Case study number 2, motivation. This is the very, very end. This is my nephew. We have these little blonde boys peeking out at us. Motivation is tricky for lots of our little ones, because the work is hard.

When we're learning how to read there is hard work to be done. When we're watching for children who would show us that they're motivated to learn to read, or who are motivated to be little readers, they're showing interest, so they're asking and they're telling, and they're identifying letters and, "That's a period. I know that letter and that's my letter." They are showing us that they're interested in that. They're incorporating their literacy skills in their play. They might be making signs or they might be writing a recipe or some of those things where we're not asking them to do any literacy work, but they're pulling it into their play. That's really exciting to see and a great way for us to tell that that motivation is coming along nicely. They're choosing literacy tasks and activities when it's free choice play time, and that confidence is increasing. When it's time for us to do work, they're keen, they may ask to do work. Those things show us that they're feeling motivated and they're feeling like they can be successful with that.

Then how do we build that motivation to read for our early little readers? We keep our instruction really nice and short and playful. We want it to be fun. We want it to be engaging. We want to keep it really positive, so if our kids are seeming like they're struggling, we need to keep our cool and be calm and confident and joyful. We might give them funny words that might elicit a little giggle or whatever that will just help to keep it light. We don't want to put that stress that we maybe feel they're like, "Oh my gosh, this is really hard on them." We want, "Oh, that's really sounding great. Can you remember what sound this one's going to say? Let's try more time." Really positive and joyful because we want them to feel that from us and we want them to feel it for themselves as well. We're providing opportunities for these littles to be successful, so we might use a shared pencil so I can do some of the writing and the child can do some of the writing.



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We can do lots of games. We're using skills that we have mastered so that they really feel like they've got this. Then we provide opportunities. These are two of my favorites. Number one is, can you do me a favor? I'll say, "Oh, I forgot to bring my umbrella today. Can you do me a favor and just write me a note and put it in my lunch bag or put it in my school bag?" They might only know a handful of letters, but they'll have a go at it, and because it just feels like a tiny job and it's a favor to be helpful, they often will have a go with that. The other one is pick a card, any card. I'll take a little wad of words or phrases or sentences, and I'll just stroll the room and say, "Pick a card, any card." It interrupts them for just a moment. They'll pull one out, they'll read it quickly to me and they'll carry right on just quick, quick, quick, and dirty. The biggest motivator for our kids is that feeling of success. We want to provide lots of opportunities for them to actually feel successful, to feel like readers. We're giving them those tools. We're teaching them those skills they need so that they can do that.

The end. Any questions? Wow, how fast can I talk? Well, you made it just under the wire there. I know. I was [?]

Susanna: You covered an amazingly broad range of questions there, but if anyone has any additional questions, feel free to put them in the chat box now. We'll try to get a few more, we'll keep you on the line maybe five more minutes because I know everyone has very busy schedules. The first question coming from the audience is, is there any scientific basis for how the letters are formed?

Emily: Do you mean formed like the print formation? Let's start with print formation.

Susanna: Yes.

Emily: Print formation letters start from the top. Lisa, we print all letters from the top and except for the letter E because it starts in the middle, but I teach it really late. That print formation in terms of teaching children to print, it's really important for their brain development, and connecting that symbol to the sound when we're teaching them together like that, we can actually really use that to support the way the letter sounds and the way the letter looks and how we print that letter. That's really useful information for our kids. I've had parents who print wrong, I guess, from the bottom up, challenge me on why this is important. Here's the thing that I often will tell kids about that, is that when we are first learning, it maybe feels like it doesn't matter because we're being slow and careful and deliberate with each letter, but when we want to be faster and write more quickly and write more neatly as we get older, that print formation matters, and it helps us be efficient and it helps us move quickly and easily from one letter to the next if we're starting the same way. We don't have to think about how to make each letter and try to remember where does the hump go and which way-- All of those things, when we teach that letter printing really carefully from the get-go, and we give lots of opportunities for practice, we're actually teaching the mechanics of that letter and it becomes part of what the child knows about that letter. Lots of us have letters that we don't print neatly enough or as carefully as we're



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maybe teaching our kids to do. Our kids will develop some habits on their own as well but if we can give them that feedback early and keep it going for a long time, and give enough practice, we can often really help our kids. If we maybe don't do that, or we haven't done that, it's often a nice time to start cursive a few years later and give them a fresh start again. Because that same thing, the mechanics helps it to be more efficient and it's important to get that going and happening so that our kids can learn to be faster and more efficient. Same with pencil grasp and print formation. They go hand in hand, and when we've got a really awkward pencil grasp, it can be harder to control our pencil and make it do what we want it to do. Again, we can keep both, try to hold that pencil like a little pinch with a little shelf behind it so that your hand can start to know what it feels like to go faster when it's time. Wonderful. Often the kids are really happy to hear that. They will work away at it because they want to be able to go faster like the teachers do when they write things down as well.

Susanna: Awesome. I know you mentioned, a few times throughout, how important it is to keep it fun, keep it light, keep it moving. How do you find you've created a balance between having enough learning and enough fun. Do you have any tips around that?

Emily: That it's partly, I think because I like it so much, it feels fun right off the top because I'm really keen and happy to do it, and the kids want to be around the people who are being happy, and so often that's often enough and it'll draw the kids in because it feels fun. It's not wild and silly, I don't mean fun like that, but it does feel fun when someone is really cheering you on and when you're being successful and you're using what to do something cool. That's helpful. Every now and then I might throw in a word that's a little bit silly, maybe. The word bum occasionally comes up, and I'm sure it does. It makes us giggle. Then we-- I say, "My goodness, even though it's kind of a funny word, can we do it? Yes, we can." So often we will go and they really will jump right on and get going with it. It's certainly not a wild time. The routine is in place for a reason, but it is a time when we can have a little fun. One of the games I love to do when we're working on spelling is I'll tell them a word. Could you write down the word run and tell me the sound? Up, run, and then I can stop sharing and that would be [?] Perfect. Yes, there. I might have them do that first word and then I'll say, "Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean the word run, I meant the word bun," and so then they're like, "Okay, Mrs.-Moorhead." They'll wipe off that R and they'll write a B instead, and I will say, "Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean bun, I meant fun. Can you just change it for me?" Then, "Okay, fine." They'll change it again. Then I'll say, "Oh, I didn't mean--" I'll keep that going for a while. They feel like it's a riot, but it's also getting four or five or six or eight more words done because they will because they think I keep forgetting the right word. Then often I'll actually get back around to the original word again, just, "That's what we had. Oh no, I'm so sorry, I didn't mean that," but it's very funny and it does hook them in.

Susanna: Yes, I can definitely feel your passion for this. I just assume that the little ones do too. Yes, they really do. I also noticed you talked a lot about the code and the code pack and code meetings. Is that part of making it fun too? That you're not talking about reading as this boring thing, it's cracking a code.



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Emily: It's cracking a code. I often introduce it in the fall as the secret code, and then I'll drop that secret after a while. Really, what they're learning is the alphabetic code so that the letters that represent the sounds that we use to read and spell and we call it code meeting and we'll pull out our code pack and look at the letters. We'll hang on that there. I'll just have these little cards that the kids know, and we can fly through saying each of our sounds really, really quickly. That part's fun too, and it feels like they know what they're talking about, and they really know some neat things, and it is fun. Again, it's just fast, but at the very beginning, when we're first starting, we do talk about it as a secret code or a code that we have to learn [?] too, and it locks them in and gets them engaged really early. Then because we work hard at pulling what we've already learned so that we're mastering those skills, they all feel successful with that, they all can keep up. Whether they're keeping up with the whole class or not, they can certainly come up with their smaller groups because they're tailored right to what they're working on and what they need. It gives them that feeling of mastery and success so that they can feel confident as they move forward. I'm just seeing that question. I start with one really, really basic font then as we progress. The very, very beginning is this very clean-looking A or G or whatever, but I will start to show them those other ones too because they show up in books and they show up when we're reading, even when we're reading a big book or something, they will appear. It's important for them to know that that swirly thing is still an A. I do like to start with a really nice clean A really, really blocky, and bold so that they know. The way that I would print it, when I write for them, or when I write our message for them on the chart, that A looks like the kind of A that we see on our card to start.

Susanna: Wonderful. I don't want to keep people any longer today. If you do have additional questions, we want to answer as many as we can. Please feel free to reach out to us through email, on Twitter, any other way. Visit our website, leave a comment, we'll try to get every answer we can. Beyond that, I'd just like to thank Emily. Thank you so much for this amazing presentation, answering all our desperate questions around early literacy. If there's any other question, as I said, please don't hesitate. On behalf of the LD@school team, I would just like to thank all our viewers for taking the time, out of your day, to spend some time with us learning. I said already I know how passionate Emily is about this. If you're here, you're obviously also very passionate about this topic. Please keep following us on all our social media, visiting our website, and keep an eye out on your inboxes for an email tomorrow.

