



**PHONICS
READ-ALOUDS**
Where engaging stories meet phonics fun!



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VIRTUAL 2025

CONFERENCE
GUIDE

JUNE 1, 2025

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ELEVATE! is the premiere professional development for primary Pre-K - 2nd grade educators. Our selection of highly accomplished national speakers are either current teachers, administrators, specialists, coaches or consultants working in schools.



**Founded in
Research**

All ELEVATE conference sessions are based on research and/or evidence-based content and practices, and guaranteed to be presented in a way that engages attendees in hands-on activities and models instructional best-practices.



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Implementation**

Every session you attend will provide you with lesson ideas and activity resources that you can take back to your classroom and use immediately!



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Speakers**

At ELEVATE, we set the bar high! All presenters are required to support their presentation content with current research, model best-practice instructional methods, incorporate active-engagement strategies within their sessions, and provide complementary lesson plans/activities for attendees to take back and use immediately in their classrooms.

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Topics Covered at ELEVATE Virtual!



Science Of
Reading



English
Language Arts



Writing



Math



Classroom
Management



Science



Play
Based
Learning



STEAM



Data Informed
Instruction



The Arts



School
Culture



Diversity,
Equity,
Inclusivity, &
Accessibility



English
Language
Learners



Social
Emotional
Learning



Gross
Motor



Cross
Curricular



KEYNOTES



#HappyClassrooms

By Mr. Greg Smedley-Warren

This keynote is designed to be an inspirational message about the lessons our students teach us each day in the classroom. In this uplifting message Mr. Greg will share stories from his classroom and the lessons he has learned and how they can be implemented in other classrooms. The hashtag #happyclassrooms is a way for teachers around the world to share positive experiences from their own classroom. Mr. Greg will describe in detail the mission of this hashtag and how it relates to your teacher's attitudes toward education and their classroom.

About Mr. Greg

Meet Greg Smedley-Warren, affectionately known as "Mr. Greg," an experienced, current kindergarten educator and the creative mind behind The Kindergarten Smorgasboard. With an impressive 18-year teaching journey, Greg's expertise spans various grade levels, including a brief stint in fifth grade and two years in second grade. However, it was a reluctant transition to kindergarten that unveiled his true passion and calling. Initially hesitant about teaching kindergarteners, Greg's journey took a heartwarming turn when he discovered an instant connection on the very first day. From that moment onward, he knew kindergarten was his destined path. Fueled by an unwavering dedication to his students, Greg has steadfastly remained in the kindergarten realm for 15 years, continually inspired by the boundless energy and curiosity of young learners.

Greg's educational journey is adorned with notable achievements, including a Bachelor's Degree in Education from Indiana University and an ELL Certification from David Lipscomb University. His global teaching experience includes enriching summers spent teaching in Ecuador. Recognized as the 2014 Teacher of the Year, Greg's influence extends far beyond his classroom walls, as an international speaker, presenter, and co-founder of the esteemed ELEVATE! conference for teachers. A passionate curriculum developer, Greg's dedication to educational excellence shines through in all his endeavors, driven by his unwavering commitment to empowering both students and fellow educators alike.



More Than Words and Flags: Creating Inclusive Classrooms That Matter

By Jere Chang

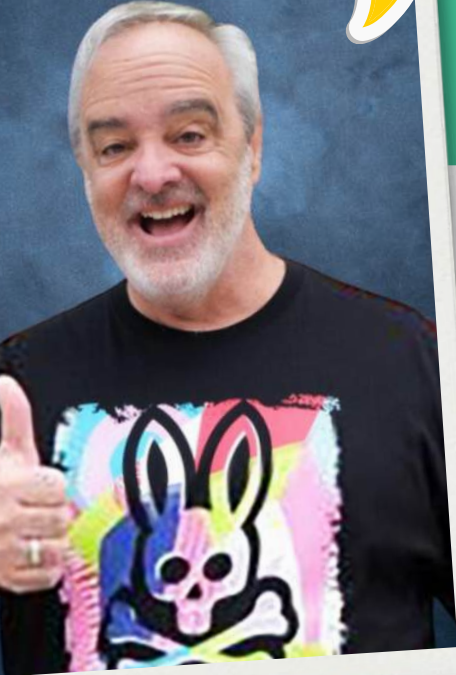
A strong sense of belonging is essential for students' well-being and academic achievement. As educators, we are dedicated to nurturing the whole child, and the key to this is inclusivity. In this engaging session, Jere shares personal stories, insightful humor, and impactful narratives to inspire educators and provide practical guidance on fostering inclusivity within their classrooms. Attendees will leave with a renewed understanding of the profound value of inclusive practices and the critical role that a sense of belonging plays in every student's success.

About Jere

Jere Chang, an Atlanta area classroom teacher for over 25 years, is an award winning TikTok star with over 2 million followers and is a dynamic and highly engaging speaker. Spending time with "Ms. Chang," isn't just viewing a reel or a TikTok trend. Her motivational talks about gifted education, inclusion, and creative thinking are visits in radical kindness, inspiration, and laughter.

Chang invites audiences into her classroom, family vacations with her wife and two young sons, even her lunch box to look deeply into something familiar with innovation and curiosity. Unlike most social media stars, Chang is honest. She doesn't cover up her teaching goofs, her aging face, or her misunderstood classroom décor but points them out with a great sense of reflexivity and humor. Her goal: to have audiences walk away feeling refreshed, safe, cared for and valued. From the moment she starts to talk, it's time to get real.

Invited twice to the Whitehouse with 30 other influencers on LGBTQ+ issues, Ms. Chang is an international speaker who draws standing room only crowds. With 10 years in gifted education and three Master's degrees in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), college administration, and applied linguistics, she speaks on a variety of topics focused on creativity and inclusion.



Learning from Our Words

By Gerry Brooks

In the session, Gerry will focus on being the best you can be, no matter what position you hold, by exploring idioms and sayings we encounter every day. He will help you strive to reach your full potential, whether you're a principal or a teacher. Gerry will challenge you to think positively, regardless of the situations you face.

About Gerry

Gerry Brooks is a veteran educator in Lexington, Kentucky. His educational experience includes six years in the classroom, two years as an intervention specialist, and 12 years as an administrator.

He is a passionate public speaker whose focus is on encouraging and helping teachers improve their instructional abilities. He also has a desire to help administrators successfully lead their staff.

An encouraging speaker, he has spoken to educational groups all around the nation. His focus is on encouraging teachers to improve their instruction through personal climate and culture strategies. He desires to help administrators focus on how to lead all staff in a positive and constructive manner.



From Scribbles to Superstars: Unlocking the Brilliance in Every Young Learner

By Dr. Richard Warren Jr.

Young learners come to us full of curiosity, wonder, and potential, but they also face unique challenges in their earliest educational experiences. As educators, how can we ensure every child feels seen, valued, and capable of greatness? In this inspiring session, Dr. Richard Warren will take participants on a journey of reflection, discovery, and action, exploring how to create nurturing, inclusive environments that celebrate the brilliance of every young learner. Through heartwarming stories and research-backed strategies, participants will gain practical tools to empower children, break down barriers, and cultivate classrooms where even the smallest scribbles can lead to the brightest stars. Get ready to transform your classroom into a space where every child shines!

About Richard

Dr. Richard Warren Jr. is an award-winning educator, renowned speaker, and dynamic professor whose remarkable achievements in the field of education have solidified his reputation as a leader and innovator. He was named the 2019 Maryland State Teacher of the Year and a Samsung “Solve for Tomorrow” State Finalist. Recognized for his transformative impact on education policy, he was appointed as the Chair of Education Executive Policy for the Governor of Maryland. In his dual role as a professor of teacher education and a K-12 instructional coach, Dr. Warren trains K-12 teachers in special education, STEM, and science, while also providing direct coaching support in schools. His work extends to leading programs focused on recruiting diverse educators, with an emphasis on Black and Brown males. As part of his coaching responsibilities, he supports early childhood educators in the K-2nd grade category, ensuring equitable and effective practices in their classrooms. Dr. Warren’s contributions to education, from his groundbreaking work with students and teachers to his leadership in policy and practice, have become widely recognized in educational communities and beyond. Follow his journey on social media @rhwarrenjr.



**SCIENCE OF
READING**



Revitalizing Small Groups and Centers with Science of Reading

By Keri Brown

Want to see your students' reading skills soar? Discover how to transform your small groups and reading centers into thriving hubs of literacy development! This interactive virtual session will equip you with practical strategies and engaging activities you can use immediately with your K-2 students. Infuse your small groups and reading centers with the power of the science of reading! We'll explore easy-to-implement routines and activities that will ignite a love of reading in your students, including engaging phonemic awareness routines that will build a strong foundation for your students' reading success. We'll also look at effective phonics activities to help your students decode words with confidence. Walk away with a toolkit of fresh ideas and the confidence to revitalize your reading instruction!

About Keri

Keri works as a math interventionist for grades K-2 in Alabama. She's taught both kindergarten and 1st grade her entire teaching career. She's all about mixing hands-on activities and meaningful tech use into her lessons. Thriving to be a lifelong learner, she is always on the lookout for fresh ways to engage her students and help fellow teachers. She shares her teaching ideas and what she's learned along the way through her platform, Enchanted Kinder Garden.



WRITING



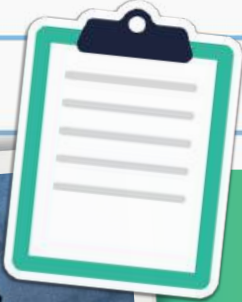
Bye Bye, Cognitive Overload! Fun, Brain-Balanced Writing Activities for Little Learners

By Holly Ehle

In this session, you'll be introduced to fun, brain-balanced activities that support early learners as they develop both transcription and composition skills without overwhelming their cognitive resources. This session will help you understand how to plan writing activities with "balance," so that you know exactly what students should be asked to do and what support you need to offer to achieve the perfect cognitive balance for students to accelerate their writing development. If you are excited to learn about how to "mix-up" some amazing sentence-combining "smoothies" or Spelling Stew, join us! Learn how to turn your littlest learners into Word Wizards and Punctuation Police Officers in just a few minutes a day!

About Holly

Holly is a full-time educator who has over 20 years of experience teaching kindergarten and serving as an early literacy specialist. She currently has the very unique opportunity of teaching both beginning readers AND pre-service teachers in her new position as a Professor of Reading Science, teaching both in the college classroom and in the university's science of reading pre-k - 4th grade model school program. Holly is passionate about student engagement, differentiated instruction, early literacy, and educational neuroscience. She is currently wrapping up her Ph.D. in Reading, Language, & Literacy with a specialization in Educational Neuroscience and loves helping teachers better understand exactly how the brain learns when beginning to read and write. Professionally, her mission is to teach EVERY child to be a proficient reader and writer, including those with dyslexia and/or other learning challenges. Outside of the classroom, her mission is to help teachers bridge the gap between research and practice in fun and engaging ways. Holly is also dedicated to giving back to educators who work so hard in the classroom, and it was this shared passion that forged her connection with the Kindergarten Smorgasboard/ELEVATE team.



Teaching Writing to Little Learners

By Abigail Peterson

How do you teach Little Learners to write, when they can barely hold a pencil? Abigail provides research and information for what YOU need to know, **BEFORE** beginning to teach writing. She will provide tons of developmentally appropriate ideas for getting Little Learners engaged and excited about writing!

About Abigail

Abigail Peterson is a Nevada licensed teacher, curriculum creator, national speaker and author of the website, Kindergarten Chaos, LLC. She spent 14 years teaching Kindergarten in the public school system and recently transitioned to supervising student teachers for a university. In addition, she fills her teacher cup by working with little learners in her home classroom/studio on a weekly basis.



**ENGLISH
LANGUAGE
ARTS**



Learning Through Play Enhancing the Preschool Experience

By Debrice Smith-Hill

In this presentation, educators will gain insights and research-based information highlighting the significance of integrating play into early childhood learning. Play-based learning is an essential strategy in early education that prioritizes hands-on, interactive experiences to promote children's cognitive, social, and emotional growth. By encouraging young learners to explore, experiment, and participate in imaginative play, educators can cultivate vital skills such as creativity, problem-solving, and effective communication.



About Debrice

My name is Debrice Smith-Hill, and I hail from the beautiful island of the Bahamas, currently residing in Florida. With 20 years of experience as an educator, I have taught first, fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. For the past eight years, I have been a first-grade teacher, and I can confidently say that first grade is indeed the best grade ever. Presently, I work as an instructional coach for students in kindergarten through sixth grade, and I absolutely adore this position because I have the best of both worlds teaching teachers and students. Additionally, I have had the honor of being a keynote speaker and presenter at various conferences. My passion for reading and phonics runs deep, as I believe it is the essential key to unlocking a successful education. I am committed to fostering an inclusive and dynamic learning environment where every student feels valued and empowered to reach their full potential. My journey as an educator has been incredibly rewarding, and I look forward to continuing to make a positive impact in the lives of my students and fellow educator.



Read, Play, Learn: Creative Engagement for Early Literacy

By Sharyn Kish

This session is filled with tips, tricks and games to use during whole group and small group literacy instruction. Attendees will leave with practical ideas and resources that can be easily implemented and adapted at the K-2 level.



About Sharyn

Sharyn Kish is a full time kindergarten teacher in Ohio. She has over 25 years of teaching experience and was recognized as an Ohio Teacher of the Year in 2020. Sharyn is passionate about literacy, student engagement and active learning in the classroom. Her goal as a content creator on Instagram is to provide teaching tips and share ideas that help and inspire other educators.



More Than Sand: Multisensory Strategies to Strengthen Your Reading Instruction

By Jackie Powell

We've all used sand to incorporate multisensory into our lessons, but there are more ways to do that. Multisensory is a great way to reach ALL readers, not just the youngest readers. In this session, you will learn about different strategies and materials to incorporate multisensory into your reading groups.

About Jackie

Jackie Powell is a K-5 Reading Interventionist in Middle Tennessee. She has over 20 years experience in grades K-3. She has a passion for working with students and helping them become their best. She is passionate about creating positive classroom and school culture. You can reach her at mppowellsowls44@gmail.com or on Twitter and Instagram @MsPowellsOwls.



Vocab for Littles - if they can say their favorite dinosaur names they can learn new words!

By Tess Kraft

In this Science of Reading based session I show teachers how to build background knowledge (shown to be a key indicator of future reading success) and strengthen vocabulary using a routine and morphology.

About Tess

I have 20 years of teaching experience in every grade K-6 except third. Early literacy has my heart though.

I went on to get my Masters in Literacy so that I could be a Reading Specialist for my district. It was an excellent program with entire courses on Phonemic Awareness and Phonics! I learned so much and it was just the tip of the iceberg!

That is when I began studying structured literacy and the Science of Reading! Then I was lucky enough to get LETRS training through my district which was life changing! It validated everything I had been learning and solidified my passion for HOW to teach all children to read.



MATH



Numbers, Shapes, It's Math Time, HURRAY!!

By Jamaica Kirby

How To Make Math Fun and Engaging In Your Classroom! Math is the most exciting subject to teach! it is hands-on, discussion-worthy, and FUN! Let's talk about different tools you can bring into your classroom, fun songs that will help your student's long-term memory of math concepts, and do some fun DIY projects together!!

About Jamaica

Hey Y'all! My name is Jamaica Kirby and I am a 6th year PreK teacher from Tennessee! I have two kids and a wonder husband. I live by the moto to "Be The Change". I want to change the lives of not only my students, but teachers everywhere! This is a hard job that we have, so let's make it worthwhile together!



Making Math Hands-On!

By Mary Amoson

Start using the very best high-quality, hands-on skill games and activities in your whole groups and small groups and with partners to promote cross-curricular learning in fun ways. You won't believe how many examples Mary shares. And, get leveled learning activities to help with remediation, skill-building, and accelerated learning. This session also has hands-on games to try and fall in LOVE with! (This session has hands-on math games for attendees to play to learn with.)

About Mary

Mary is an enthusiastic and passionate current Kindergarten teacher from Georgia with 19 years of experience. She holds a Master's Degree in Early Childhood Education and an Educational Specialist Degree in Instructional Technology. Recently, Mary earned an endorsement in Dyslexia. In addition to teaching full-time, Mary finds joy presenting to educators across the country for more than 15 years. She loves sharing engaging ideas, hands-on activities, and rigorous content that has worked with her own kindergartners through her website, Sharing Kindergarten. Mary is committed to instilling passion in teachers because she believes that passion is truly the secret to increasing learning and achievement.



Movement and Motion in Math

By Adam Dovico

Come on and get up off the chair with Dr. Adam Dovico as we explore different ways to add movement and motion to our math lessons! These activities and extensions are opportunities to engage students in content and get the blood flowing! See how we employ cross-lateral exercises to strengthen brain work and coordination for our young learners!

About Adam

Adam Dovico is an accomplished teacher, curriculum facilitator, principal, professor, speaker, and author. For the past two decades, he has taught students of all ages through his engaging and rigorous teaching style. He has also provided professional development for educators from around the world through his keynotes, workshops, and books. You can often find Adam standing on a table or chair dressed in one of his signature outrageous and amusing suits. He has been recognized by organizations such as the Japan Fulbright Memorial Fund, Learning for Justice, and the Atlanta Falcons for his leadership and teaching, and he continues to work for greater equity in schools through his culturally responsive pedagogy. You can learn more about Adam's teaching and leadership online at adamdovico.com, on social media @adamdovico, or in his books: *Inside the Trenches*, *The Limitless School*, and *When Kids Lead*.



**CROSS
CURRICULAR**



Pathways to Possibilities: Unlocking Every Students' Potential



By Kara Rigsby & Megan Diede

In this dynamic and interactive session, participants will explore the concept of multiple pathways of learning, an educational approach that recognizes and values the diverse ways in which students learn and achieve their full potential. We will dive into the various learning pathways and educational strategies that cater to every learner's unique needs and strengths. Join us to transform your teaching practice and ensure every student has the opportunity to succeed and thrive through multiple pathways to learning.

About Kara and Megan

Kara Rigsby is a professional development expert, instructional strategies specialist, forward-thinking educational leader, and current educator who strives to enhance and improve how instruction is being delivered all while increasing student growth and teacher effectiveness in the classroom. Kara works with educators at all levels specializing in curriculum mapping and developing integrated subject units to enhance student growth and teacher effectiveness. With over a decade of classroom experience, Kara has first-hand expertise in implementing innovative instructional strategies and developing classroom learning experiences that will transform the classroom of today for the students of tomorrow. Megan Diede is an educational leader, professional development expert, and current classroom teacher who has passion to bring back the joy in teaching by improving the way instruction is being delivered in the standard classroom. Megan works with educators at all levels specializing in creating classroom learning experiences and integrated subject units to improve student success. With more than a decade of experience in the elementary classroom, she has the hands-on experience to be able to transform instructional practices.



Free Flowing Centers - Giving Students More Choice In Their Learning

By Beth Pittman

Need something for your students to do while you work with small groups? Free flowing centers is the answer! Come and learn how Beth uses free flowing centers in her classroom during ELA and Math blocks. We will discuss set up, teaching your students stamina and how to select an activity that works for them. Student choice helps with more engagement and less behavior issues!

About Beth

Beth has been teaching in the classroom for 18 years! She has taught K-2 and is currently a 1st Grade teacher in California. Beth is passionate about giving her students choice in the classroom, positive classroom management and building relationships with students and families.



Organizing the Chaos: Clearing the Clutter in Your Classroom

By Kayla Hair

Is your classroom feeling overwhelmed by clutter and disorganization? Get ready to transform your teaching space into a calm, efficient, and welcoming environment with my session, *Organizing the Chaos: Clearing the Clutter in Your Classroom*. This session is designed to equip you with practical strategies and actionable steps to declutter your classroom, making it easier to focus on what matters most—your students. This session will provide a combination of demonstrations, and practical tips, so you can leave feeling empowered and ready to take action. Say goodbye to clutter and chaos, and hello to a fresh, organized classroom that fosters focus, creativity, and success!

About Kayla

Kayla Hair is a passionate kindergarten teacher based near Nashville, Tennessee, with eight years of teaching experience. She co-teaches a class of 30 kindergarteners and focuses on creating an organized, engaging environment that meets state standards while keeping learning enjoyable. Her hands-on approach and well-developed systems allow her classroom to run smoothly, even in her absence.

Through her platform, *Move Mountains in Kindergarten*, Kayla shares practical tips, strategies, and resources to help fellow educators improve classroom management and student engagement. Her weekly posts and *Teachers Pay Teachers (TPT)* store provide valuable tools for creating effective and organized learning environments.

Outside of teaching, Kayla enjoys traveling with her husband and their daughter. She plans to expand the lifestyle section of her blog to share travel insights and recommendations, blending her love for education and exploration.

CROSS CURRICULAR SESSION



Morning Meetings

By Mr. Greg Smedley-Warren

If you are looking for a tool to improve your classroom management and community, then look no further than a morning meeting. You will see how 10-20 minutes each morning can change the dynamics of your classroom and make it more like a family. You'll learn the components of morning meetings as well as ideas for greetings, activities and morning messages to use in your classroom!

About Mr. Greg

Meet Greg Smedley-Warren, affectionately known as "Mr. Greg," an experienced, current kindergarten educator and the creative mind behind The Kindergarten Smorgasboard. With an impressive 18-year teaching journey, Greg's expertise spans various grade levels, including a brief stint in fifth grade and two years in second grade. However, it was a reluctant transition to kindergarten that unveiled his true passion and calling. Initially hesitant about teaching kindergarteners, Greg's journey took a heartwarming turn when he discovered an instant connection on the very first day. From that moment onward, he knew kindergarten was his destined path. Fueled by an unwavering dedication to his students, Greg has steadfastly remained in the kindergarten realm for 15 years, continually inspired by the boundless energy and curiosity of young learners. Greg's educational journey is adorned with notable achievements, including a Bachelor's Degree in Education from Indiana University and an ELL Certification from David Lipscomb University. His global teaching experience includes enriching summers spent teaching in Ecuador. Recognized as the 2014 Teacher of the Year, Greg's influence extends far beyond his classroom walls, as an international speaker, presenter, and co-founder of the esteemed ELEVATE! conference for teachers. A passionate curriculum developer, Greg's dedication to educational excellence shines through in all his endeavors, driven by his unwavering commitment to empowering both students and fellow educators alike.



CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT SESSION



Transitions - How to Maintain Students Engagement and Attentiveness During Transitions from Centers



By Mr. Jay

Are your students having a hard time staying engaged during Transitioning? Mr. Jay is extremely excited to help you create some new and fun transitions methods and techniques for your classroom. Join Mr. Jay as he Transform wait time into fun Learning time. He will present Preventative Strategies that will help create smooth transition at home, schools, and communities to help decrease the risk of challenging behaviors occurring.

About Mr. Jay

My name is Jeremy Sturdivant Sr. (Mr. Jay) I'm originally from York, Alabama, and I am a Lead Pre-k Teacher. I've been teaching and living in Atlanta, Georgia for 8 years now. I am very passionate about teaching our youth new ideas and strategies. I enjoy being the person in a child's life who listens to their thoughts and feelings. Being able to watch children grow and learn is amazing. Teaching in ECE is special to me because I help with setting the educational foundation in their journey of becoming respectful, intelligent, and well-rounded individuals. I have a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education and I'm currently in Grad school getting my Master's Degree in Secondary Education of Mathematics with an emphasis in STEM. Although academics is important, I love to focus on daily interactions that encourage social, emotional, and physical development.



Classroom Connections: The Key to Student Engagement

By Megan Fadal

This session focuses on the essential strategies for creating a thriving classroom environment. While many of these bonding techniques are implemented at the start of the school year, they often fade away over time. Building strong relationships requires time and effort initially, as students and teachers get to know and trust each other. However, maintaining these connections throughout the year is equally important to sustain a supportive classroom culture and enhance student engagement. When you have a few extra minutes before lunch or at the end of the day, use that time to continuously build relationships with your students. Don't miss the opportunity to keep those connections going and have fun!

About Megan

Megan Fadal is a dedicated elementary educator in East Texas with a strong passion for teaching 2nd grade. She holds a Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction, specializing in Educational Technology, and is certified to teach from early childhood through 6th grade, as well as English as a Second Language and Gifted and Talented programs. Throughout her career, she has gained valuable experience teaching in classrooms across Europe, Oklahoma, and Texas, working with students from Pre-K to 3rd grade. Driven by a commitment to inspire both students and fellow educators, Megan's mission is to foster classrooms where students can flourish academically and socially. Her sessions are packed with research-driven insights and practical techniques, equipping you to teach with skill and enthusiasm!



SCIENCE



Cultivating Growth Through Gardening

By Josie McClain

I have had so much success implementing a small-scale windowsill garden in my classroom and will share tips and tricks, reasons why it is beneficial to students, ways to get started, how it can be tied into curriculum, and practical manageable strategies to start your very own classroom garden!

About Josie

Josie McClain (@mrs.mcclainsbrains) has almost a decade of teaching experience, with the last 6 years being in second grade. She is a published author and also trained in LETRS Science of Reading. She has a bachelor's degree in special education and a master's degree in education with an emphasis in social-emotional learning (SEL). She was a finalist for the 2023 Arizona Rural Teacher of the Year, and runner up for the 2024 Teach Kind Teacher of the Year. She is passionate about diversity, equity, and inclusion, meeting the needs of all learners, and rural education. When Josie's not teaching, she enjoys traveling, escape rooms, and spending time with her husband and their pets.



S.T.E.A.M.



Blast Off with STEAM: Exploring the Engineering Design Process through Picture Books

By Michael Newman M.Ed

Discover how to integrate STEAM education through a fun space theme. Learn the engineering design process and enhance your lessons with engaging picture books. Participate in a hands-on challenge to design a rocket with everyday materials. Walk away with practical strategies and resources to inspire your young learners!

About Michael

Michael Newman is an award-winning educator, national speaker, and Adjunct Education Professor at Houston Christian University. With over a decade of experience in STEM education, Michael serves as the Elementary STEM Facilitator for La Porte ISD, where he develops innovative programs that ignite curiosity and build essential skills for the future workforce.

As the founder of The Evolutionary Classroom, Michael leads engaging, hands-on workshops and professional development sessions, helping educators across the country bring STEM learning to life. Known for his interactive, theme-based training, he specializes in equipping early childhood educators with tools and strategies to inspire young learners.

Michael holds both a Bachelor's in Education and a Master's in Educational Technology Leadership from Lamar University. Outside the classroom, he is a dedicated family man and enjoys cooking and spending time with his wife, Brittany, and their two daughters, Harper and Everleigh. His mission is to empower every student and educator to realize their worth, embrace their potential, and pursue their dreams.



**DATA
INFORMED
INSTRUCTION**



Data Driven Behavior: Using Data to Identify Function and Support Students

By Rebekah Poe M.Ed

This session, led by Rebekah Poe, M.Ed., will help teachers identify the function of student behavior by utilizing targeted data collection and analysis. Educators often encounter challenging behaviors that can disrupt classroom learning, especially among early elementary students with expressive or receptive language difficulties. By analyzing patterns and identifying the underlying needs that behaviors represent, teachers will develop hypotheses for behavior functions and introduce effective replacement behaviors. Through interactive scenarios, teachers will learn evidence-based techniques for collecting and analyzing behavior data to address the root causes of disruptive behaviors. Participants will also explore strategies for de-escalating students in crisis, incorporating interventions that improve communication skills and address common behavior triggers. Teachers will leave with actionable steps to create behavior interventions that support communication and emotional regulation, improving overall classroom behavior.

About Rebekah

Rebekah Poe is an award-winning special education teacher and a national teaching conference presenter with over a decade of experience in the special education field. Her first book *Blueprint for Inclusion* will be available early 2025. As an education consultant, Rebekah focuses on providing teachers with the training necessary to offer equitable education and establish connections to students of all ability levels in an inclusive setting. When she's not in the classroom, she can be found at the closest coffee shop with a piping hot latte and a good book! Connect with her at RebekahPoeTeaching.com



THE ARTS



If You Can't Sing Good (or Well), SING LOUD!

By Debbie Clement

Let's integrate the power of music with a focus on the driving potential of 'the beat' into your classroom and school day. This workshop is especially for the teacher of the youngest, those with special needs, English Language Learners -- and especially teachers that feel they can't carry a tune in a bucket. In other words? This workshop is designed to build your confidence and expand your willingness to encourage your students to 'get the beat.' The best feedback will be the participant who responds, "Well. I can do that!" Build your classroom community culture by establishing routines and rituals that establish a foundation and framework for continuity and eager participation. All with a beat!



About Debbie

Debbie Clement has over 35 years of experience as a 'music-lady' and has written and recorded over 100 original songs for children. She has provided staff development on the Arts from coast to coast at conferences large and small. Her humorous and invigorating presentations have garnered three national Keynote stages, including Vegas and the Jumbotron screen for a gathering of international Kindergarten teachers. In addition, she has toured internationally to our military bases across Europe. Debbie has now taken four of her original songs and transformed them each into traditional picture book format adding the hats of both author and illustrator. Her books are quite often sung first by pre-readers and then they provide a bridge to reading. "Red, White and Blue" is a patriotic song-as-book and often follows the recitation of the Pledge. The song was written in the immediate aftermath of September 11th. The book's illustrations are Debbie's representational quilts including majestic purple mountains and a 9-11 firetruck. It received the national 'Indie Book Award of Excellence.' "Mighty Wings" is the culmination of Debbie's career. It is a scientifically accurate, STEM/STEAM extravaganza of color dedicated to the conservation of the Monarch butterfly. The two original songs within the book follow the Monarch from metamorphosis to migration. It has already received 5 Stars from 'Reader's Favorites' within the first few months since publication. A huge hit with those interested in protecting this beloved ambassador insect and our larger planet. Debbie Clement is quite simply, 'changing the world, one song at a time.'



Creative Classroom Crafts: Enhancing Learning Across Subjects

By Shannon Cunningham

Bring the joy of hands-on creating and learning back to your classroom! Join Shannon to discover how simple craft activities can be incorporated into your lessons to support student engagement and reinforce skills in reading, math, science, and more. This session will show how creativity is a powerful tool for connecting concepts and deepening understanding in any subject.



About Shannon

Shannon Cunningham is an early literacy educator and coach in a public school district in North Texas. Over her education career, Shannon has spent time in classrooms in Arizona, Nebraska, and the great state of Texas. Shannon has a master's degree in curriculum and instruction. Shannon is certified to teach preschool - 6th grade as well as English as a Second Language. With a passion for teaching both students and teachers, Shannon's goal is for classrooms to be a place where students can grow and thrive academically and emotionally. You will find that Shannon's sessions are packed with research and strategies to help you teach with joy and confidence!



**DIVERSITY,
EQUITY,
INCLUSIVITY,
AND
ACCESSIBILITY**



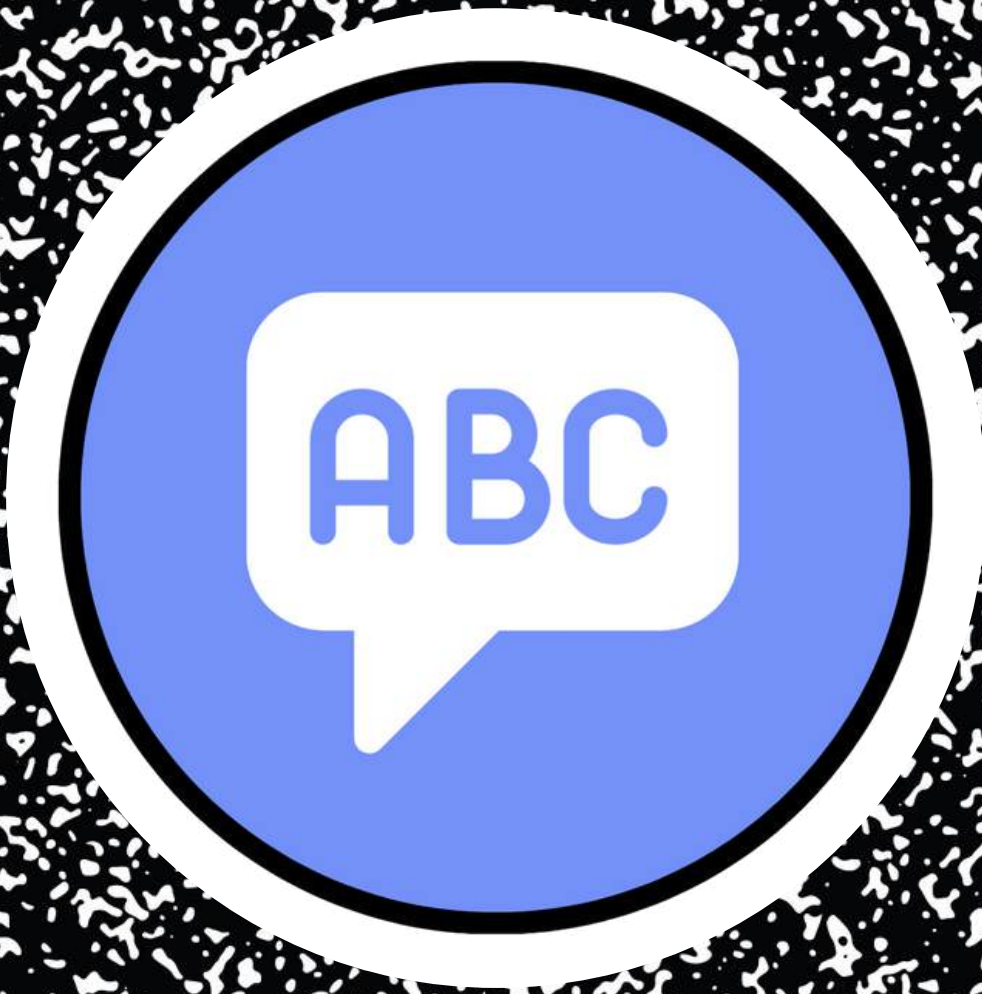
A Happy New Year for ALL: Establishing a Neurodiversity- Affirming Classroom

By Stephanie Higgs

It is inevitable. Most of us will teach a combination of neurotypical and neurodivergent students each year, and most of our undergraduate and even graduate level teacher preparation programs did not teach us enough about supporting our neurodivergent learners. Join Little Miss Gifted, Stephanie Higgs, as she explains the qualities of neurodivergent learners, the myth of average, and how we can establish a classroom environment from the first day of school where all of our learners feel safe, welcome, happy, and comfortable.

About Stephanie

Little Miss Gifted, Stephanie Higgs, is an award-winning gifted educator and differentiation coach in Nashville, Tennessee. After a decade of teaching Pre-K, 2nd grade, and 4th grade, Stephanie has a heart for lightening the ever-increasing burden of general educators nationwide! Stephanie is an international professional development presenter who is known for her passion and high energy. Plan to leave Stephanie's sessions with easy-to-implement strategies you can put in place the very next day! Her sessions are can't-miss!!



**ENGLISH
LANGUAGE
LEARNERS**



TPR Made Easy



By Whitney Ramirez

TPR, or Total Physical Response, is a way of engaging the whole student into their learning. In this session, you will learn more about TPR, as well as tips on how to implement it successfully through your teaching. Through hand motions, body movement, and music, TPR could be the extra magic you've been looking for to enhance student engagement in your classroom!

About Whitney

Whitney Ramirez is a first and second grade teacher in San Diego, CA. Currently in her eleventh year of teaching, Whitney has taught five different grade levels, experienced a variety of school cultures, and worked with many unique teaching personalities. She loves public speaking, and even had a moment where she made it to the third audition round at American Idol (way back in 2010!). She also has two Master's degrees, and was a DI collegiate athlete, playing lacrosse at St. Mary's College of CA. There are things that she learned on the field that have made her a better leader and teacher. When she's not in her classroom, you'll most likely find her snuggling with her mini goldendoodle Gus, reading at the beach, or grabbing a beer at a brewery (usually accompanied with a slice of pizza). Whitney loves a good happy hour, playing board games with her husband, and bingeing some Netflix or Bravo.



**SOCIAL
EMOTIONAL
LEARNING**



Seeing the World Through a Different Lens

By Shannon Estrin

Using my story to inspire parents, educators, and community members, this workshop emphasizes that everyone has a unique superpower or gift, and it takes a patient, special person to bring it out. Shannon provides practical behavioral management techniques and strategies to enhance positive outcomes for children and adults with autism, depression, anxiety, and other mental health challenges. Participants will leave empowered with tools to support and uplift those they care for.



About Shannon

Shannon Estrin is an education consultant and author specializing in inclusive education and diverse learning behaviors. A California native, he holds a degree in Disability Studies from Chapman University and a master's in Special Education with a focus on inclusion from the University of La Verne.

Shannon works closely with teachers to develop strategies for managing diverse learning behaviors, and he also supports children with autism facing trauma at a psychiatric hospital in Atlanta. His book, *Seeing the World Through a Different Lens*, offers insights into understanding diverse learning needs, and he's a sought-after speaker and trainer across the U.S.

Beyond education, Shannon also designs for his own fashion brand, encouraging self-expression through personal style. His commitment to inclusive, supportive environments makes him a key voice in special education and behavioral management.



Core Connections: Linking SEL Competencies to Emotional Regulation

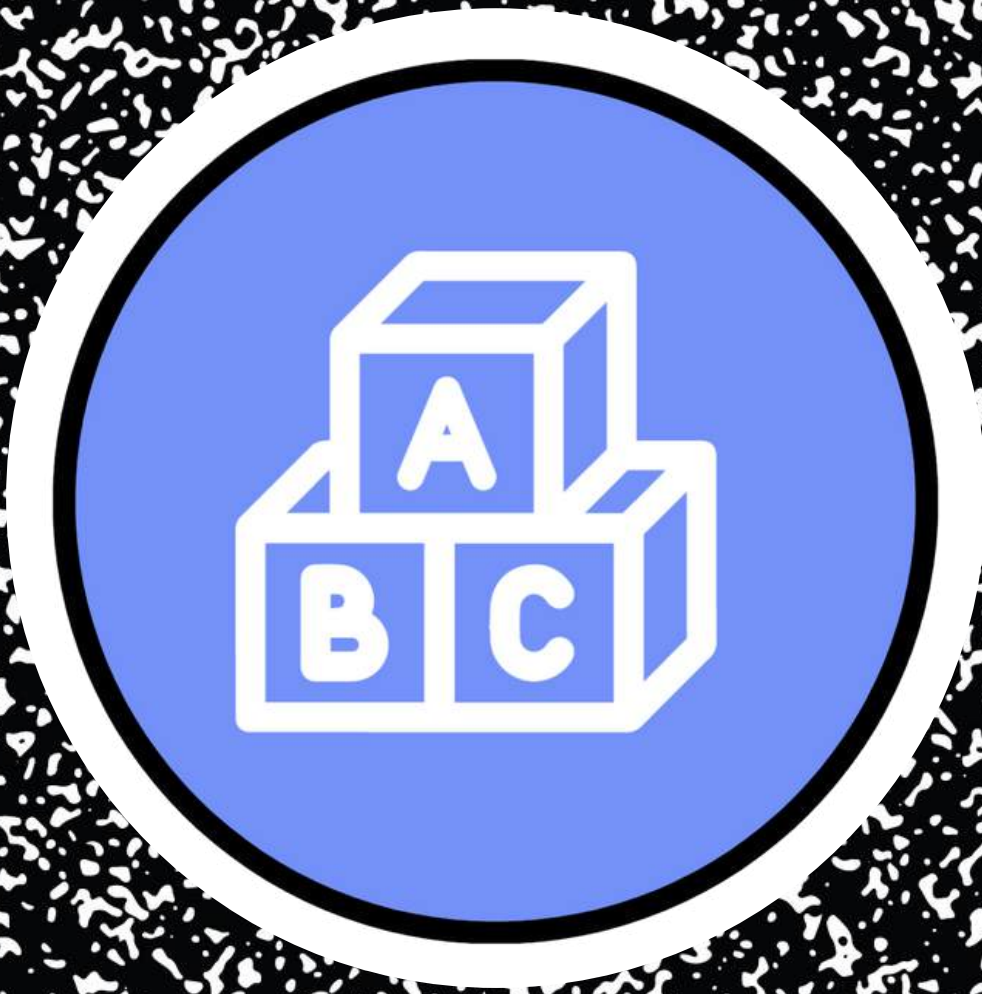
By Crystal Oswald

Get ready to dive into the core competencies of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and how they tie directly into helping students manage their emotions. This session breaks down the five core SEL competencies—self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making—and connects them to real-life strategies for emotional regulation. We'll explore practical ways to support students as they work through their feelings, giving them the tools to succeed both inside and outside the classroom.



About Crystal

Crystal Oswald is a district service coach in the North Shore of Chicago. She works with a variety of schools as an instructional coach with an emphasis on Social Emotional Learning and literacy. Prior to this position, she was an SEL Curriculum and Instruction Specialist for 3 years and an elementary school teacher (grades 1-5) for 14 years. In her spare time, you can find her hanging out with family and friends, reading, golfing, or doing home improvements.



**PLAY-
BASED
LEARNING**

PLAY-BASED LEARNING SESSION



Morning Magic: Start the Day with Free Choice Play!

By Lindsay Harrison

This session will explore the positive impact that morning free-choice play centers have on learning, development, and behavior throughout the day and will give tips on how to plan, organize, and manage these centers to maximize the benefits.

About Lindsay

Lindsay is a PK teacher who resides outside of Atlanta with her husband and two children. She has a Master's degree in Early Childhood Education and over 20 years of teaching experience. She has a passion for developmentally appropriate practice and teaching the "whole child". She also creates resources for hands-on learning in preschool and kindergarten.



LEVEL UP Learning: Classroom Games That Engage and Educate

By LeAnna Wolkis Goldstein

Get ready to explore a variety of interactive, hands-on games designed to foster teamwork, communication, and problem-solving in young children. From literacy to math, you'll discover new ways to incorporate collaborative play that encourages your Little Learners to move, think and create, all while mastering essential skills. Join LeAnna to explore fresh ideas that will turn your classroom into a dynamic learning PLAYground where every child feels excited and empowered to learn!

About LeAnna

LeAnna Wolkis Goldstein is an energetic and passionate Kindergarten Teacher from Arizona with over 25 years of teaching experience. She earned her Bachelor's degree from Arizona State University, a Master's Degree from NAU, an Early Childhood Endorsement and achieved the rigorous advanced credentials of National Board Certification. While teaching in her award-winning classroom, The "Wolkis Wonderland," she designs mini hands-on center based stations that are brought to life with novel realia. As a nationally recognized presenter, LeAnna empowers educators to create cooperative learning environments utilizing music, movement & manipulatives that foster 100% student engagement. Follow along inside LeAnna's magical experiences on Instagram: @wolkiswonderland Twitter: @WolkisWonders and her website: Wolkis Wonders.



Play is for Everyone

By Melysa Mei

Using play to connect, engage, empower both teachers and children and how it is liberation, freedom, and sustainable for everyone. Learn tips and tricks for more play in the classroom and advocating for play to families and admin. Walk away with sharable pamphlets, articles, and implementable activities and strategies.

About Melysa

Melysa is currently a Pre-K teacher in the country's largest school system where she practices an open-ended child-led philosophy through play. With over 16 years and a variety of experiences in the realm of early childhood, Melysa spreads the play-based love through her business, Pre-K Spot. When she is not teaching she is hanging with her husband, two young boys and rescue doggy.

PLAY-BASED LEARNING SESSION



Cube-Its, Mnemonics, and Wikki Stix® OH MY!

By Jennifer Jacobsen

In my lively and interactive breakout session, you'll discover a range of multisensory techniques that have been proven to boost reading fluency in dyslexic students. You will learn why multisensory approaches are essential in every reading lesson, and you'll have the opportunity to create practical materials to take back to your classroom in a hands-on "make-and-take" session. Additionally, you'll gain insights into how dyslexic students' brains work and why a nontraditional teaching approach is necessary. I'll also share real data from my own classroom to demonstrate the impact of these methods. While many educators feel that the joy has been removed from teaching, I'm here to show that incorporating fun is the key to developing a classroom full of fluent readers!

About Jennifer

Mrs. Jennifer Jacobsen's journey as an educator showcases the profound impact of dedication and continuous learning in the field of special education, particularly in addressing dyslexia. Her 19-year tenure as an Intervention Specialist underscores her commitment to supporting students with dyslexia, a condition that often presents significant challenges in traditional educational settings.

Mrs. Jacobsen's expertise in Structured Literacy and dyslexia intervention is not only reflected in her classroom success but also in her role as a public speaker and educator. Through her company, Demystifying Dyslexia, LLC, she shares her knowledge and experiences with fellow educators, equipping them with the tools and strategies needed to create inclusive learning environments where all students, including those with dyslexia, can thrive.



**GROSS
MOTOR**



GROSS MOTOR SESSION

Move to Learn: Boost Math and Literacy with Gross Motor Play

By Hilary Statum

Unlock the power of movement in your classroom! Join Hilary to discover how gross motor activities—like jumping, balancing, and dancing—can improve your students' math and literacy skills. Learn fun, easy-to-implement strategies to integrate movement into counting, letter recognition, problem-solving, and more. Combining physical play with learning is a fantastic way to help kids develop a love for learning. Head back to your classroom with ideas you can implement immediately!



About Hilary

Hilary Statum is an ESL teacher and Reading Instructor in Middle Tennessee with over 15 years of experience at the school she attended. She has experience teaching kindergarten, first, transitional-first, second, fourth, and fifth graders! She is the published author of two books, *Solar System for Kids* and *Kindergarten Activity Book: Unicorns and the face behind Pencils to Pigtales*, a blog for parents and teachers. She holds a Master's Degree in Instructional Leadership and enjoys coordinating and teaching her school district's free parent English class. Her favorite days are spent with her two young girls and baby boy, husband, parents, siblings, and the rest of her very large extended family. You can connect with Hilary on all social media platforms using the handle @pencilstopigtails.

Research Citations

All ELEVATE conference sessions are based on research. It is one of our requirements to be a speaker for ELEVATE.

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