

In The News with Zoo

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:06.7] ANNOUNCER: Next is Dr. Charlene Wrighton to discuss everything early education about your children or students in our new show, Ed. Talks with Dr. Char.

[EPISODE]

[0:00:22.0] CW: Hello. This is Dr. Char Wrighton from Zoo-phonics. I have a fun story to share with you today, something I received an e-mail this week and a very surprise. I'm just excited to share it with you.

This e-mail was from a woman who listened to one of our radio shows. She was so inspired by it, she had to actually drive an hour and a half to come visit Safari Learning and then she e-mailed me and explained that when she was a little girl, she struggled with reading, writing and spelling. It really wasn't they noticed it, but it really wasn't diagnosed, or really tested until she was in fourth grade. It showed that she was very smart, but she just couldn't read.

They were talking about putting her in special ed and they just felt like, "No. This isn't appropriate. She's way too high. She doesn't qualify." Someone said, "You know, I've heard of a program called Zoo-phonics and let's give this a try instead." They did. They started working with her on Zoo-phonics. Within a year or less than a year, she was tested out at reading at a high fifth-grade level. She actually became a year ahead of herself when they were done with the program. I find that really, really delightful and exciting, because it's just so nice to hear, and how fun to hear that it actually came from one of our radio shows, or podcast.

Touched by that. My heart has always been for children who struggle with learning, because I've been surrounded by them. My whole career was spent with children who just struggled with not only their academics, because that's the primary point, that the reason why they're in the program, but also how it makes them feel, how frustrated and sad and discouraged and lacking in confidence that these children become. To hear of a success story is just really wonderful. I thank her for sharing.

Oh. Well, so she started going to – she had already started going into early education taking classes and she is soon going to open up her own home daycare. She will be using Zoo-phonics. Definitely fun and exciting to hear.

I thought I'd share with you something that has – recently, a trip that I've made and I want to give you some background, because it's pretty wonderful also. Again, it excites me. It's where my heart is. This whole thing started about five or six years ago, when a pastor and school administrator, named Bill Carver, came to visit me at Safari Learning and he wanted to learn Zoo-phonics, and so he could take it back to his school.

He also was traveling to Africa quite often, several times a year with a group of teachers and other people who had vested interests in trying to help. It was from Watchman International. It's a Christian organization. They go in there and they help with wells, water, training adults so that they can learn a trade in their community, so that they can erase their economic levels in their homes and community. This is something that he was very involved with. They were starting schools.

I trained him for two days. Then he flew back and he trained his teachers. They started using Zoo-phonics at the school and then his teachers would travel to Africa with him and then they would train the teachers in the schools that they had established. It grew, because they started going to different countries and they would take Zoo-phonics with them and we donated the materials and the training. That was our gift back, because it's just something that we believe so strongly in.

Over the course of five or six years, the schools have done so well that they've gotten the notice of the government and the government actually came to them and said, “We want your help. We want to do this with all our schools.” That was amazing, because I actually just heard that story recently. That is really exciting, because that's what you want as a greater – especially government, because that's really where the power is, and the decision-making. Anyway, to hear of their success is wonderful.

Now I've seen videos of these children and they are absolutely precious. They are so wonderful. There are 60 children, or more to each class. There's dirt floors. There often are like Adobe-type bricks, so that they're like mud bricks building. No doors. Holes just for windows. Very little place

to stick a bulletin board, or pictures, but they do try to tape them up there. No way of protecting the materials even, so the pastor has to take them home each night to make sure that they're safe, or the teachers.

These children are so precious and so wonderful and so incredibly well-behaved. It's like having 60 children sit on benches and participate. They do a lot of group learning, because there's no room for breaking up into centers. Yes, they can go outside certainly and do different things and play obviously games and physical games, but to see the videos of them doing Zoo-phonics and doing that, singing the song and doing the body signals to match the animal letters and even spelling words with their bodies, signaling them out, so much fun to watch.

They're reaching children who are say, 2-years-old, all the way through higher grade levels. You can watch them on YouTube. I'm sorry, YouTube. Watch the Zoo-phonics children from various countries in Africa. Definitely take a peek at that, because it just really warms your heart.

Now we're moving to about three weeks ago. I got a call from the same gentleman, Bill Carver. He said, "I have got an idea and I want to see if what you think about it." He said, "I have been recently been introduced to a pastor here in South Carolina." He said, "Their literacy rates for their African-American students are so low, that the current –" there's just a huge concern and this pastor wants to do something about it.

Now a back story about the pastor; he has taken over his dad's church, his dad has passed on and has had the church in that town, or that city for quite a long time. It's very close to Charleston, or it's in Charleston. The father was very involved in the civil rights movement with Martin Luther King. He sees how far they've come and yet, literacy rates are still very, very low.

I did some research on that and found that only 18% of African-American fourth graders are proficient in reading and 19% are proficient in math. It's too low. It's unconscionable. It tells me something has to be done. If you think about it and if you do the research on it, you'll know that since the 60s, billions of dollars have been spent trying to raise literacy rates for all students; African-American, Caucasian, Latino, all children. The scores show some improvements in some areas and other areas, they have not budged. Sometimes they're even worse.

This is something that just cannot be. The passion behind the idea of taking Zoo-phonics into this community and remember, that we are all over the United States. We are in schools in South Carolina and quite a few schools. In fact, we even have a teacher trainer there from Zoo-phonics who travels all over, giving training sessions. She lives in South Carolina, but more on her later.

The whole idea was to say, what can we do? Let's bring Zoo-phonics to this community. He has daycare, or a preschool that serves two-year-olds, all the way through kindergarten after-school program. The school is a preschool. Then they'll come to the center after school for fun snacks, care and some help with literacy rates.

He has not really used a program. He's made up something that is fun. He's been using the first letter sounds in children's names that are in the school, but this first of all, doesn't cover all the whole alphabet. Then what do you do with that after you address the initial sounds in people's names? There's just no place to go. That was why he was so excited when he heard about Zoo-phonics from Bill Carver. This pastor's name is Tyrone Dash, and he's a wonderful, wonderful man.

Also, what happened is that there were other people who wanted to help with this project. They wanted to volunteer. On Friday of last week, I met with them. Flew to a South Carolina, met with them. I had two meetings; one at lunchtime and then one at dinnertime, because they couldn't make – different people couldn't make the various meetings, and so we decided to have two. Then Saturday, I spent the entire day training the volunteers, the teachers, administration. There were four other pastors who came to take the training for their centers, as well as a council, city councilman from the city.

Also, there were other people; helpers and parents. Parents were there. I wanted this group to see real children learning. I asked if two or more children could come. Actually, and it was very short notice, but they got two absolutely adorable little children, little girls to help me. They actually stood on chairs and did the body signals, the Zoo-phonics body signals with the animal letters. They'd never seen it before. I would teach them and then they would show the teachers and administrators and volunteers, etc.

Having a workshop was one thing with all adults is one thing, but when you actually have real children there and listen to their comments and watch their joy and the fun that it is, made a whole different picture and it was great.

Just a little research. I shared this before, but there's a researcher, his name is Boykin. He's done a lot of research over the course of many decades. He himself as an African-American gentleman and grew up in the school system. His premise is that schools in America do not match how the culture of the African-American child, because the families are musical, lyrical, larger-than-life, a lot of laughter, a lot of family in small rooms with TV going on in one room and music in another and a lot of people coming through and a lot of family connections and a lot of social connections, and also very, very physical.

Then we take these children and we put them in a classroom. We ask this child to sit still and be quiet. That's how typical traditional reading curriculum is. It's sit still and be quiet. You either read quietly, or one child reads aloud at a time and the bodies have to be still. Again, Zoo-phonics is just the opposite. We want our children to wiggle their bodies and make sounds, of course, the letter sounds, but also to be dramatic and to use songs and play and physical activities, like running around.

I've shared some of my fun exercises that I do with the children. They're actually very, very physical. I shared the research with them and we felt this is what we need to get started. This is going to be a pilot program, just to see if we can make some change and reach these children in a whole different way of reaching children, especially little boys in the classroom, by being more physical and using drama and music and literature, etc. as we go through the Zoo-phonics program.

Again, a part of the research was to talk about the word verve, and that was what Blanken said, is that African-American families have verve. Their culture has a verve and that means larger-than-life, highly energetic, drama, music, just the fun factor. I was thinking, well the Latino culture is like that. Then I was thinking, "Wait a minute. I own a preschool. They're all like that." I mean, children are just like that naturally. They cannot hold still. They're not supposed to hold still. They run everywhere.

If they have to get from point A to point B, they run, or they skip, or they hop, they're doing something with their flailing arms. It's just their bodies just do this. They'd love to share, they love to talk, they love to sing, they love to dance, they love to run around. Again, if we just save that for the playground and not bring it into the classroom, we are missing the most important and critical way of reaching children and that's their senses and through their bodies, eyes, ears, mouth, taste, smell, everything.

That was our fun activity. The workshop went wonderfully well and the pastor has a huge commitment to this. They're going to assess the children first and then they're going to start teaching them Zoo-phonics. We donated all the materials to their classrooms and even sent a Zoo-phonics kit with another teacher from another preschool at another center.

Anyway, I will let you know how that's going in the next coming months as we watch the children grow, but it was a very, very exciting endeavor. That is our purpose is to help children first learn the alphabet. That's your foundation. We've told you before, I've told you before is that we teach lowercase letters first, we teach sounds first, not capitals and not letter names, because they actually interfere. We use our body to signal and spell and read. We decode with our body. We write with our body, as we're trying to spell words.

As soon as we use our body, it's like the brain just comes alive. It actually cues the brain. It's fun. That's the most important part is that it's fun. Children deserve and need desperately to have fun while they're learning. Too often, especially as children get older at curriculum, academics become so serious that the fun and the joy is lost and then children lose interest in school. It becomes a drudgery, something that you have to get through. Way too many dropout before they finish their education. That's another drawback.

If we can get our children to have a wonderful foundation and the early years, starting with preschool, starting with toddlers, if we can get them that wonderful foundation where they've got confidence and we give them the start they need and the reading, writing process, then you're going to have children who grow up to junior high, high school, who feel confident enough to go ahead and go to college, or seek a career of their choice. That's our hope and we'll certainly get back to you, because I'm going to be really excited to share that. I'll share that a little bit at a time.

The other thing, I was just going to let for all those of us who live in Tuolumne County, that we're getting really, really close to opening Safari Learning Academy. That's on office Striker Court, off of Tuolumne Road. If you're going up Tuolumne Road heading towards the casino, we are right before you get to Menlo Park, or Standard Field and we're on the left-hand side, you can see that huge gray and green building, that's our Safari Learning.

Already, Safari Learning is at center of sports and fitness center and we've got 200 children there. We have 285 children waiting to get into our center. We are very, very excited of having making that happen. We are hoping to do an opening. We still have a few challenges waiting for our internet and all the software, all the technology, the technological part of it, which is really critical, because we have a lot of safety features that require internet and hookups. Oh, my goodness.

We have a parent check-in that is also all done on computer and iPads. We're going to be actually having iPads there for parents to sign their children in. Our safety, we have siren doors, so children can't – if they leave, we can sure hear. They don't leave, because they can't stand the siren sound and they know it's big trouble. We have that at Safari Learning and it just works so well. We also have webcams in the classroom, so that parents can go on and grandparents can go on and take their iPhones and their computers and they can watch their children learn and participate with other children and with the teacher and on the playground and play with their friends and even eat lunch. It's been a wonderful system and we want to continue that.

That's our only challenge right now, the building is magnificent. Shout out to the plumes and other contractors who have done a phenomenal job, or subcontractors. They've been delightful to work with.

Anyway, watch for our opening and we'd love – we're going to have Tuolumne County, Chamber of Commerce is going to do the ribbon cutting for us and a fun evening with us. Then we're going to definitely do a big open house and open that up to the whole county, so we'd love to have you there. Keep posted. We'll be announcing that more and we'll probably post that also in motherlode.com.

Anyway, that's our news for Tuolumne County. We're very excited about it. We'll be packing stuff up at Safari Learning right now, the present Safari Learning and we'll start moving things

over a little at a time for the next three weeks. Our playgrounds are going up right now as we speak. Our kitchen is in and ready to go, bathrooms and sinks are in ready to go, flooring, walls, everything's painted. Again, we're just waiting on technology. That's that.

If you ever have any questions, please feel free to call Zoo-phonics or Safari Learning. I'll give you both of those numbers. Safari Learning is 209-588-0920. You can also go to www.safarilearning.com, all lowercase letters and you can read about us and learn what you need to know if you have a child, or a grandchild that needs care and education. Zoo-phonics, we're right here in Sonora and we're off of Greenley on Morningstar, so it's 995 Morningstar Drive Suite B, as in Bear. The telephone number is 209-536-4926. We'd love to hear from you. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask.

I thought I'd give you some information on all the different things that you can look at and listen to, watch, so that you can understand more about Zoo-phonics and Safari Learning as well. We have some really fun things, because Zoo-phonics is playful. We like to keep it playful when we do our YouTubes. One thing that you can see all the podcasts that I have been doing over the last year, so those are there. They're very long each. I talk on different topics, because I want – my audience is always preschool teachers, parents of early childhood and grandparents, because we know grandparents participate with their grandchildren a lot. Those are there.

We have instructional videos on how to do playful, fun things; things that you can do at home, things that you can do in the classroom. Certainly, you'll learn more about our products, or educational products. They're everything that we have written is very easy to learn yourself as the teacher, as the adult. It's easy to impart on children, because basically you're just playing with them. You're using the animal letters and body wiggles and fun alliterative names that teach the sounds like Ali alligator and Baba bear and Catina cat and so on. You do an animal related body gesture, or body wiggle that goes with it.

Then you have this wonderful package. We have so many fun materials; music, stories, breeders, books, cards, posters, you name it, we've got it. We have one wonderful technology as well, so that you can – you can download them on your iPads and your iPhones as well. Their games teach the alphabet and also teach how to put letters together to form simple words. Then we teach the blends and the digraphs there as well. It really is extensive for different ages of children.

We have a new character that we've added. We've always had Zoophonia. Zoophonia is our retired schoolteacher. I've mentioned her before. She retired from teaching school. Now remember, this is all in our imagination, but she retired from teaching school in England and now, she is in her 70s and still has all this energy and her love for children and she just wants to teach them how to read, write and spell. She ends up going to Africa and she's working with the children there. That's why part of what I had told you earlier struck such a chord with me about Bill Carver and the teachers going to Africa and teaching children among other groups, that we also donate materials to, and train them as well.

We have four or five different church groups that have gone to Africa and for different countries, at least nine different countries. I've been on the phone, are e-mailing today and yesterday with a woman who's taking it to Liberia. She makes about four trips a year, and so we're donating materials to her and training her as well. She's going to be going to Liberia.

It's just so exciting to see this moving forward. When you think about that and you think about the 33 years ago when we were first talking about Zoophonia, our retired school teacher, who was going to Africa to teach the children, and remember, that was our imagination. To have the real connection actually happening and watching children change and grow and empowering them to seek higher education, enabling them, they would normally not be able to receive an education, because these are the outlying areas. There's absolutely nothing out there, but tiny villages. There's really nobody to teach them.

This is just something that that various organizations have started. Just to see the connection between Zoophonia and reality is just amazing to me. Again, the fact that we thought of her 33 years ago and here it's happening right now, so it's wonderful. It's always been Zoophonia and Zig zebra and all the animals. Zoophonia gathers the animals from all over the world. Again, the program is very multicultural, because you've got yaks from Tibet and the Himalayas and then you have the penguins from the South Pole and then we have gorillas and zebras from Africa. I mean, all over the world. Our domestic animals, like deers and rabbits and cats and you name it. All of our animals come from all over the world, and so we get to study in our curriculum, we get to study the various countries and we get to study all the scientific things to learn about the animals as well, and the countries. It's just this wonderful multicultural experience, as we're

teaching reading, writing, spelling and then math, art, music, science, social studies and self-help skills, etc.

Anyway, back to Zoophonia and Zig zebra, so that's on our music and we have stories about them. We found somebody to create a whole new character and it is really, really fun and funny. His name is Safari Sid. He of course, in our imagination is Zoophonia's favorite nephew. Zoophonia is his favorite aunt. That's on YouTube as well. The first the first video that you'll see is him going through the entire alphabet, signaling and giving the sounds and what a fun and crazy way to teach the alphabet, the sounds and the signals of the alphabet. Definitely catch him, because he's way too funny.

Then what we're doing is we're going through the entire alphabet and we're making a two or three-minute video on every letter. Of course, we always focus on shape and body movement. You're going to see Safari Sid and Zoophonia and Zoophonia's hot-air balloon and they're going to go all around the world and capture the animals, so that they can help children learn how to read, write and spell. Definitely watch it, because it's really, really funny.

I had warned you a little bit before. I don't want to say anything negative to – I want this to be wonderful. There are many Zoo-phonics videos out there that teachers have joyfully put on, have videotaped themselves, or their children, their classrooms and they're wonderful, except they don't always teach it the pure way that Zoo-phonics teaches. Just be really careful. When you're watching it, they're doing it with joy and they're doing it the way they have remembered it, the training, or their modifications of it, but remember that they're not always pure.

We do have Dana Schuetze, one of our trainers doing the whole alphabet, the perfect, the Zoo-phonics, the authentic Zoo-phonics way. Definitely watch that. We have a Facebook page for Zoo-phonics that has a lot of interaction with other teachers and parents. That's really fun, because you can go in and you can ask questions, you can chat with other people, do a lot of back-and-forth.

Safari Learning has its own Facebook page as well and it's always updated. That's a wonderful place to go. Definitely check those out. We're on Instagram, so check that out. I have a website called drchar@zoophonics.com. I also have a website called – that's my e-mail. Then I have a drcharkeynote.com that you can go to also, and you can ask questions. I put research on it.

Anyway, check that out. We have two wonderful websites for Zoo-phonics and Safari Learning; www.zoo-phonics.com and www.safarilearning.com, all lower case. Definitely check those out.

There's a bookcase on the Zoo-phonics one that gives every bit of information about us. It looks like you're really pulling a book off the bookcase and then there's our research from E3 research. There's just all about us. That's a great way to learn about Zoo-phonics. There's also a video of me in the red dress on the front page. That's a really good place to start. If you really want to learn about Zoo-phonics, that's a great place to start.

The Safari website also tells all about Safari Learning Academy and is always updated. Definitely take some time and look through both of those. Again, if you ever have any questions, just call us, or you can also as we always say and always – if you're listening to the radio show, or podcast, you can also call the radio station.

We'd love to hear from you. If you have any – I know we have a lot of people in Tuolumne County that were really born and raised with Zoo-phonics, maybe not born, but I know they were in my sister's classroom in Tuolumne County, as well as my classroom. We have many different classroom schools, where in Tuolumne County we're using it and are still using it. It's really fun to meet the adults. Sometimes the adults will come through our preschool – to our preschool and they'll bring their children and say, "Oh, yeah. I was in Mrs. Bradshaw's class, or I was in your class, or I learned it at the Jamestown Elementary, or Twain Harte Elementary, or [inaudible 0:30:24.9], whatever. It's really fun to meet people as an adult, because I usually test them on their Zoo-phonics signals.

Anyway, that's all about us and we'll see you next time.

[OUTRO]

[0:30:40.6] ANNOUNCER: That was Ed. Talks with Dr. Char. You've been listening on KAAD-LP Radio, live on 103.5 FM, or streaming online at kaad-lp.org. If you would like to have Dr. Char answer any of your questions, please e-mail your question to dr_char@zooophonics.com. Thanks for listening and stay tuned for what's next on KAAD-LP Radio.

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