**Getting Started with Playing with Words**

JAY HILLER: Hi. My name is Jay Hiller. I'm a speech language pathologist at Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Questions have come up about how to get started with the Playing with Words technique if you have never done it before.

And I think I understand where that comes from. Many of us are used to being encouraged to think in terms of we say something, the student says something back, we check off whether it's right or wrong. You know, it's easy to look at the videos on the website and think, how can I somehow cram those into the way I'm already thinking about teaching?

So, I have some thoughts about this, and my thoughts are in two directions. The first is really general, just tell you some general ways that I find it helpful to think when you're using Playing with Words technique. And the second is just a super concrete way to get started.

So, generally, I would encourage you to give yourself permission to play. You can go into a session with an idea of what you'd like to teach, because that's good practice. But you can also be willing to let that go a little bit, maybe lose control in a controlled way, follow where the story leads. Give yourself permission to play. Give yourself permission to be a little bit dorky.

I've gotten very good results with that, and I predict that you will, too. A thing I was thinking about is that in one of her books, Linda has a questionnaire for teachers where she asks, what makes this child fun to be around? I don't know if I know the answer to that for every student I've ever had, but I do know the answer to that for the students that I've used the Playing with Words technique with. So that's my general advice-- be a little bit dorky. Give yourself permission to play.

My concrete advice for getting started is I always start the stories-- I always start the technique by planning with a student who the people in the story are going to be. Sometimes I'll say, who do you want your story to be about? And students will say, I don't know. So, I say, do you want your character to be a boy or a girl? And then I'll ask, how old are they? Then I'll ask, what do they like?

Oh, I'm sorry, I ask what their name is. I ask, what do they like? I ask, what don't they like? And I ask, what are they afraid of? And just doing that, I learn all kinds of things about what my students are thinking. And then we do the same thing for a second character. I'll sometimes-- not always-- ask where they want the story to be.

And then my final question is, would you like to start the story, or do you want me to start it? And if they choose me, which they do a lot, I'll write two or three sentences, and then I'll say, add to my idea. Add to my idea, in my mind, is the Playing with Words version of the improv "yes and," which I also learned from Linda. Adding to my idea is just a really, really great phrase to use with students.

And what's interesting is it really doesn't take long, in many cases, for them to pick up on that and say, would anybody like to add to my idea, if we're in a group. OK, I hope this was helpful, and good luck.