



UFLI in Ontario Kindergarten – FAQs

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Is a phonics program the best way to teach reading to our Ontario kindergarten students?

Decades of research have shown that teaching phonics explicitly and systematically, (not incidentally or through discovery), when students begin school, is the best way to ensure reading success (Ehri, 2020). The program doesn't have to be UFLI (though there's a reason so many Ontario boards, schools and educators are choosing it), and it doesn't even have to be a published program, but it does have to meet the necessary criteria.



Is this an age-appropriate approach for Ontario kindergarten students?

UFLI Foundations was designed and piloted as a core program for K (Year 2), Grade 1, and Grade 2 students. While the implementation of the program with Year 1 students has not been systematically studied yet, we've heard positive feedback from many educators successfully implementing it with these students. The UFLI team is excited to learn more about the implementation of the program in the Ontario kindergarten context (with Year 1 and Year 2 students). Because Year 1s are mixed in our classrooms, they can benefit from the early instruction and practice, though we should always bear in mind that it is a two year kindergarten program and expectations for achievement are not the same in both years. Note that short periods of explicit instruction complement and do not replace the play-based aspect of our program for either year of students.



Should we be teaching phonics this way yet when it isn't reflected in our 2016 Kindergarten program document?

[The Ontario Human Rights Commission's Right to Read Report of 2022](#) recommended explicit and systematic phonics instruction beginning in kindergarten. In January of 2024, the [Ministry of Education announced plans to revise the language expectations of the Kindergarten program](#), and these revisions are underway. In the meantime, the [B2 Continuum of the Grade 1-8 Ontario Language Curriculum 2023](#) includes a Kindergarten/Grade 1 column that gives us some idea of what some of those new expectations may be, including letter/sound correspondences for short vowels, single consonants and digraphs which are all part of UFLI's kindergarten scope and sequence. When we know how to meet the human rights of our youngest students, why wait?



Are there any concerns about the effectiveness of using an American program in Canada?

The brain's process of successfully learning to read happens the same whether the young reader lives above or below the 49th parallel. While there may be the occasional word spelled differently in UFLI, our Canadian students will soon become very used to seeing American spellings in their reading material.



Should I use an oral-only phonological awareness program with my Year 1s, and a phonics program like UFLI with my Year 2s? Or oral-only phonological awareness with everyone for part of the year before beginning phonics instruction?

In the past this might have been encouraged, but more recent guidance tells us that students do not need to learn or master larger units of sound (e.g., syllables, rhyming) before working with individual units (phonemes), and valuable instructional time can be lost focusing on these skills. We also know that it's best for students to begin working with both sounds and letters immediately, with no need to do oral-only phonemic awareness work as a precursor (Clemens et al., 2021). UFLI includes brief oral blending and segmenting, the two key phonemic awareness skills for reading and writing, at the beginning of each lesson, and phonemic awareness is strengthened through phonics instruction.



Is it better to use a different phonics program with Year 1 students and start UFLI in Year 2 so kids aren't repeating it?

One of the wonderful features of UFLI is that it spans kindergarten through Grade 2, and students and educators alike can benefit from the consistency of the lesson format, slideshow template, sound wall key words, etc. For this reason switching from one program to another is not recommended. From a school and system perspective, using one program is also beneficial for providing professional learning and implementation support to educators. Some Year 2 students profit from a second year to consolidate their learning, and some may be ready for more challenge. Your beginning of year data will help guide you.





UFLI doesn't include gestures, jingles, etc., to accompany the letter/sound correspondences. Should I supplement with a program that does?

As our friend Anita Archer says, "Teach the stuff and cut the fluff". While some effective programs may include these elements, they're not necessary from a research standpoint, and may even add to cognitive load. We recommend keeping things as simple as possible.



UFLI teaches two letter/sound combinations per week. Is it better to slow it down with kindergarten students and just teach one per week?

Many of us are used to the "letter of the week" approach, and while it may seem intuitive to slow it down in Ontario, science actually tells us that a quicker pace is generally better for students, including (and especially) those who are at-risk and multilingual learners (Sunde et al., 2020). We want kids to rapidly add to their repertoire of known letter/sound combinations so they can begin to read and write words, practicing and deepening their learning. UFLI Foundations uses interleaved practice, so new concepts are continually reinforced in subsequent lessons. Certainly allow some time at the beginning of the year to establish routines, but then aim to follow the timing of the scope and sequence as best you can.



30 minutes is a long time for some kindergarten students to sit. Can the time frame be modified?

Breaking the lesson components into shorter chunks of time to match shorter attention spans, especially in the Ontario context, is a reasonable adaptation and one that many educators have successfully used. We've seen many creative ways of dividing the time blocks and the participation of Year 1 and 2 groups. See chart below for one example that an Ontario kindergarten teacher has found effective, and always remember to keep a "perky pace"!



Sample UFLI Lesson Breakdown

As originally designed, each lesson, spread over 2 days, is 2 x 30 minutes – 60 minutes total.

In this adapted time frame, each lesson, still spread over 2 days (e.g., a.m. and p.m. on first day, a.m. only on second day), is 3 x 20 minutes – 60 minutes total. This chunking also allows for more streamlined management of manipulatives for young children. It is important to note that it still incorporates ALL the instructional practices included in the program, with a focus on building both accuracy and automaticity with skills.

Part A (no manipulatives)	Part B (manipulative letters)	Part C (writing materials)
Step 1	Step 5 (review)	Step 3
Step 2	Step 6	Step 5 (letter formation)
Step 4	Step 7 (spell word)	Step 6 (word chain writing)
Step 5		Step 7 (write word)
Step 7 (introduce/read word)		

Note that Step 8, connected text, can be done in small group. This can be an area to adapt, remembering Ontario K is a two-year program and it's not a concern if the Year 1s aren't yet reading longer texts. For example, you may work at word/short sentence level with Year 1s, and sentence/full text level with Year 2s.

References:

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