Bluum Together: Episode 1- Emily Hanford

Mike Caldwell: Alright, greetings and good day to our podcast listeners. Our first ever podcast here at Bluum, *Bluum Together*. I am Mike Caldwell, and I'm a new member here at Bluum. Joining me is Emily Hanford... so excited to have you here, Emily.

Emily Hanford: Thank you for having me. I'm glad to be here.

Mike Caldwell: We had a great morning at the Capitol this morning, where Emily presented a lot of her research over the last 20 years. And she's going to share a little bit about some of that today in our short podcast as we kick off this new initiative here at Bluum, with *Bluum Together*. So, why don't you first start with just a story that can kind of set the stage for this conversation today.

Emily Hanford: Well, maybe this will be sort of a surprising story, but I think I'll just tell you a little bit about myself and my memories of learning to read. I don't remember very much about learning how to read. I think I learned to read pretty easily, and I have 2 kids who are now 23 and 20, and I think they learn to read pretty easily. And my younger one actually was reading chapter books at the very beginning of kindergarten, and I had no idea how he learned to do that. And I really didn't think very much about how kids learn to read. I didn't think about how my kids were going to be taught to read in school. I certainly didn't think about whether they're going to be taught to read. I assumed they would be taught to read and like I said, they learn to read pretty easily. And so fast forward, I told you that my kids are already adults. I started getting interested in this whole reading thing about 6 years ago, and I have learned so much that I didn't know. I really took for granted that learning to read was just something that wasn't difficult. But it turns out it's actually difficult for quite a few people. And, as I said this morning, it doesn't have to do with intelligence, right? There are really, really, really smart people who struggle to learn how to read. And what I've learned over the past few years is that the kind of instruction that kids get in school in those first few years of elementary school are so critical. And they can really get kids off to a good start being readers, even though we know that maybe 40% of us or so are kind of like me and my kids, don't need much instruction. But it turns out that a lot of kids really do need instruction, and that they need more explicit instruction than they're often getting in school. So, I've just been sort of digging into that over the past few years.

Mike Caldwell: Yeah. And we were talking earlier about my background, you know, I went to 3 different first grades, and you know, and came from pretty humble beginnings, if you will. And really, until listening to your podcast series *Sold a Story*, I hadn't really even thought about, like my own reading instruction. And I'm just so thankful that I learned how to read, and never really had to think about it that much, and so shout out to my teachers, whoever you are, wherever you are, that I was able to learn how to read. But your podcast shines such a critical light on this, that I think so many of us take for

granted... that when you send your kids to school, It's just assumed they're gonna learn how to read. That's kind of the most basic foundational thing in education. And how important that is, you just make that assumption. But your podcast, and the work that you've been doing the last 20 years has really shined a light that we shouldn't assume that. So, talk to us a little bit about the research that you've done over the last 20 years and specifically on *Sold a Story,* and that podcast, and some of the work you did before that.

Emily Hanford: Yeah. So, I've been a reporter for a long time, and I've been an educational reporter for almost 20 years, but I only got interested in this learning to read thing about 6 or 7 years ago. And actually, I was reporting on college students. And so, a lot of the reporting that I had done really was focused on preparation for higher education. Who gets an opportunity to go to college or other forms of higher education, who finishes. Because really what I've been interested in my work for a long time are questions about the role that education plays in promoting opportunity and promoting chances at sort of equality, like the bit you know. To what extent is education really helping promote social mobility in this country? Because I think hundreds of years ago, we founded public education in this country because we thought that was really critical to a functioning democracy. And this idea of social mobility that you should be able to, you know, start from the bottom and make your way to the top, which is not an image that I really subscribe to, but that everyone has a chance. And everyone having a chance has a lot to do with what kinds of educational opportunities they get. And so I got interested in this through meeting college students who are telling me about their struggles with reading, and I was so amazed by that. I was like, how? How are you doing this? How are you doing through college? And they started telling me about sort of strategies they had for reading. And it turns out that several of these college students probably had dyslexia, not something that they knew, or you know, something that they sort of figured out about themselves. And it had never really been identified in school, they'd never gotten good help for it in school. And so, I started with being really interested in that. And so, I started interviewing a lot of parents of kids with dyslexia, and they've become very organized over the last 10 or 15 years in this country, really drawing attention to the fact that their kids are struggling the most. But what I realized in digging into the research on that and talking to parents all over the country is the kids with dyslexia are the ones who are most being harmed when there's not good reading instruction going on in school. But there are lots of kids who really aren't getting what they need, and it gets back to... you're lucky if you learn to read pretty easily and didn't need much instruction. You're one of the lucky ones. But, we are not actually born with brains that are wired to read. We can get really really good at it, but we are born with brains that are sort of ready to speak and learn a spoken language. But learning to read is a very different thing. And over the past 50 years or so there's been just a tremendous amount of research that's really revealed, what is reading? How does it work? How do you become a skilled reader? Why do some kids struggle? And what are the things that kids need to learn? And so that's what I've been trying to explain through some very basic explanatory journalism over the past several years. And then *Sold a Story* podcast, which came out about a year ago, was really an investigative podcast that was sort of asking the question, sort of how and why. How and why did it happen that many, many, teachers don't know what they should know about how reading works, what kids need to learn, and what they should be teaching all kids to give all of them their best shot at becoming good readers.

Mike Caldwell: And we'll have the link on our website to *Sold the Story* as well as the other great work that you've done, and we'll link to that, and I would just say... I don't care if you are a parent, or soon to be parent or a future parent, or a teacher or administrator. I don't care what you do. You should, You should really, if you have a vested interest in children, your own children or others... You should listen to this. And it's for me, it was really eye opening. And like I said, I've been in education for a long, long, time as a high school principal, and you know, I haven't really thought about other than my own kids, like you know, teaching kids how to read. I just assumed that everybody's doing it the same way, right? But your work really kind of shined a light that that's not the case. What I loved about is you know, you spent some time in this morning, you talked a lot about the science of reading and what is, good reading instruction and what's not? Can you talk a little bit about when we talk about the science of reading. What are you talking about? What is the science of reading?

Emily Hanford: It's a great question, because I see that term not being used quite accurately. A lot. So I hear people talk about the science of reading as if it's like a thing you do, or a program you buy or a way to teach. And it really isn't. The science of reading is just term about this huge body of research. So, over the past 50 years or so all over the world, in all kinds of different languages, different kinds of researchers, cognitive scientists, neuroscientists, linguists have been doing all this really fascinating research to try to understand, how do we read? Like, how does that even work? And that was actually sort of a mystery of the human mind for a long time, and I think one of the reasons we fought about how to teach kids to read, because we've actually been fighting about this since the dawn of public education in America. I think one of the reasons we fought about it is because no one really knew the answer to that question, how did people learn to read? So, we fought about it for good reason, because no one really knew. But what's happened, is a lot of those questions have been answered. It's not like we know everything about reading and how it works. There's research ongoing, you know, scientific research is an ongoing thing. There's still things we need to figure out. But scientists over the past 50 years really answered pretty thoroughly, some very basic fundamental questions about reading and how it works. And the problem is that there were a lot of theories and ideas and beliefs about how to teach it, that sort of predate all that research. And you can find sort of, you can trace back some of the things you see in schools today, and see that they rest on some theories about reading that were sort of developed before you really knew how people learn to read. And so, it turns out that there are really some misunderstandings, some things that aren't right, that are sort of deeply baked into education. They're in the materials. They're in the professional development. They're in the teacher preparation programs. They're in the sort of craft knowledge that teachers pass along to each other. And that's what I was trying to sort of reveal and show in *Sold a Story*. And I would say that the fundamental belief that's misunderstood, is that reading is something that pretty much happens, as long as you read enough to kids. That it'll all come together on time, that it's a developmental process. But it's not. It's really something that requires explicit instruction if we want to make sure that kids get good at it. And you and I are both people who learned to read pretty easily, so some people are sort of, it just makes more sense to them more quickly. But there was some, there must have been something in your own background, enough exposure, enough of people pointing out words and sounding them out, that code of language of written language really started to make sense to you. And it started to click. So, back to the science of reading. It's a body of research. It's not a thing you do and I think many, many, people are learning about it for the first time. Many teachers are like “Oh!” And many of them had a gut level feeling that

something wasn't quite right. They knew that there were kids that they weren't reaching. They were sort of bothered by the fact that they didn't really know how to teach kids to read. And so often I come across teachers who are also parents and they really have their huge Aha moment because they've been teaching first grade for 15 years, and then their daughter goes to school, and she can't read, and they don't know how to teach her. And then they go down the rabbit hole that so many people have, which is, wait a minute. What's up here? How does reading work? And what is this? And how do I teach this child? And there's just a lot of really good information out there right now.

Mike Caldwell: Yeah, I think you know, we can easily be led astray, or think that what we're doing is the right thing. And from a parent perspective, you know, your child comes home with a book, or with materials from the school, and you just assume, you know, that's the right way to do it. You don't question it.

Emily Hanford: You trust the school.

Mike Caldwell: So, what are some of the maybe differentiators? If you were an investigative parent and trying to understand it, you know, is my school teaching, you know, based on the science of reading or not, you know? Maybe talk a little bit about the difference between a phonics-based approach versus whole language or balanced literacy and help kind of shine a light on what are we talking about? What does it look actually look like?

Emily Hanford: Well, one of the first things I want to say to add to the definition of what is the science of reading. It's not phonics. Right? So, I think that's really a misunderstanding. Phonics is an important part of it. But I think what has been missing is that a lot of teachers and others haven't understood, Why? Why is phonics instruction so important? And it turns out that phonics knowledge, having good phonics skills, understanding something about how the sounds and words are represented by, and combinations of letters, is a really foundational fundamental. You cannot become a good reader unless you understand that. It doesn't mean you need to be able to explain it. But it means that you have, you've developed a good, implicit understanding of, statistically speaking, sort of how English works and how you read those words. But the really, the really profound thing for me was understanding that learning to read is different than learning to talk. Kids come to school, usually having some pretty decent skills when it comes to spoken language, it can vary. We know we have a lot of kids in the United States who do not speak English at home. That's gonna have an impact on learning to read in English, obviously. And you, your eventual ability to sort of read and comprehend what you read is definitely founded in your spoken language ability. But it's a different process, and your brain how you do spoken language, and how you do written language. So, when a kid comes to school, the sort of primary task of becoming a good reader is understanding how the sounds and the words you know how to say are represented by letters on the page. And it's a basic understanding of that alphabetic principle. And then understanding how that works in English. And again, some kids need just a little bit of instruction, and are sort of off and running. But some kids get stuck really early on. And there's a real continuum, right?

There are some kids, some not insignificant proportion of kids somewhere between 6 to 10 to 12 to 20 percent of kids where it varies a lot who really do have dyslexia or a reading disability. But it can be hard when schools aren't teaching reading well. It can be hard to dis-untangle what's a disability and if the kid was never taught how to read. So, I think it's really important, for I think one of the problems is, parents do send kids to school and trust, of course, that the school knows what they're doing when it comes to teaching reading. And you know, I think that often many people in schools are admitting, we didn't know what we should have known about teaching reading. So, we are here saying, “Hey, we didn't know. And we're trying to learn now, and we're gonna do better.” So, my word of advice to parents is to watch it carefully. If you have a gut level feeling that something isn't quite right, trust your gut. Investigate it further, ask questions, find other parents in the school who might be asking the same questions. Your kid is not the only kid who's struggling with this. There are other kids in your child's class, who are, too. And maybe it's not. Maybe the instruction is good. But your child really needs extra help, really needs intervention. That's an important thing to identify. I think, as we get better at teaching all kids how to read one of the benefits of that is, it'll make it clearer, more quickly, which kids are really struggling and need more intervention and more help. So, there's a lot that can be done. I think this is a really hopeful story, because I think what the scientific research has shown us is that pretty much everyone can be taught how to read pretty well, you know, there's going to be variances. Some of us are going to be much better readers than others. But there are a lot of kids out there who are really, really, struggling with very, very, basic skills and instruction can really change the course of a kid's life. Like we can really change kids lives by doing a better job with this.

Mike Caldwell: Absolutely, I think that’s most important thing that we can do in education. Right? Teaching a kid how to read.

Emily Hanford: I think so. It's such a foundational skill, you know? Like, I learned to read pretty easily. I loved school. Now I see that I think those things are kind of connected. There are a lot of kids, when you are 5 years old and you start school, you know that you are supposed to be learning how to read. You're supposed to be sort of learning how to be in school. And you're supposed to be learning how to read. And kids figure out really fast, I've interviewed kids about this. I've interviewed adults who remember. And you know pretty quickly that this is hard for you, and if you're not being shown how to do it, it's really confusing. And it really can start kids, the whole experience of school, you just get off on the wrong footing with this one. I got off on a good footing. My kids did, too. We learned to read easily. I don't really know much about how I was taught. I don't think I was really taught very much, but I was one of the lucky ones. There are no silver bullets here, but I think a lot of the problems that schools end up dealing with a little bit later; engagement, absenteeism, behavioral problems, there is research that shows that these are correlated, and in many cases, caused by early reading difficulties. There is a lot that we are spending time on, that I think we could really change the course, the trajectory for the individual children in the schools overall, if we did a better job of this in the early grades.

Mike Caldwell: You mentioned, ask good questions, you know? I think that as investigative journalist as yourself, you probably know the right questions to ask. But, a lot of people might not know the right

questions to ask. So, if you could give advice to someone out there that is trying to discover, you know, is this reading program based in science? What is a question that you would ask, let's say a teacher or administrator at a school to better understand that?

Emily Hanford: You know one of the things I've actually heard from administrators at schools when they're doing things like interviewing teacher candidates is just ask them a question like, “What do you know about how kids learn to read?” I would actually ask that of your schools. Can they explain it to you in a way that you understand? Because there is a way to explain this that's pretty understandable. So, do they know? I would ask that... I would really ask questions about how is my child doing in reading? And how do you know? What's the information? What's the data you have? What's the assessment you gave? Can I see it? Can you explain this to me? Can you explain it to me without the edu-gunk, you know? Can I understand it? Because I think this has been part of the problem for parents for years, as they've gone to the school saying, “I think there's something wrong here.” and the school's like, “no, don't worry about it.” And the parents didn't know what to ask. And in many cases the schools just didn't know what they needed to know about reading. So, they actually really didn't know how to help the most struggling readers. So, I would definitely ask that, how do kids learn to read? How are you teaching my child to read, how is my child doing? And how do you know? And how are we going to know if he or she is making the appropriate progress? And you should be able to walk away with answers that you understand, that seem really clear. And you know, like, “Okay, here's what we are watching for me and my classroom teacher and the school.” We're in this together. We're going to be together. We are going to be watching for these things.

Mike Caldwell: So, I'm gonna flip it around. How would you answer that? You're the teacher. You have done all this research. I ask you those questions. Would you refer to the, you know, the simple view of reading and the formula? Or is that kind of something you would zero in on? Or how would you approach that question, the answer to that question?

Emily Hanford: Yeah. Well, I think one of the things that I would want to hear, and someone answering like, How do? How do kids learn to read? We recognize that it requires good, explicit instruction. We recognize that it's not the same as teaching kids to read. We really want to make sure that you are reading a lot to your child at home. That's not enough for them to become a good reader, we realize that there's more to it, and it's our job to do that in school. And here's how we're doing it. We are starting with their knowledge of spoken English. But we utilize that knowledge to begin to show them how the system works. We're starting with the simple. We have a systematic way to do this. We start with some of the simplest letter patterns in the English language. We teach those to kids. We assess whether they know them. We give them books with those letter patterns and we have them read in those books. We see how well they do. We progress to more difficult things. This is where we want them to be by the end of kindergarten. And this is how we know this is where we want them to be by the end of first grade. That's what I would want to hear, and what I wouldn't want to hear is what parents have been hearing for a long time, which is, “don't worry about. It's gonna be fine. Just read lots of things to him.” No. They, they should worry about it. You should worry about it. It takes in English,

even typically developing readers who have good phonic skills, usually need 2 or 3 years to really master the basics of English. And then they're kind of off and running. And they're really teaching themselves a lot about reading through reading, right? You're really learning a lot of what you know about vocabulary and language and the knowledge you get through reading. And you really want that to start happening by the end of second or third grade. And what's happening to a lot of kids is they're not getting the good foundational skills. And things are kind of falling apart in third or fourth grade. The one other thing that I have heard from a lot of parents to beware of is that kids can look like good readers in kindergarten, first and second grade, especially with some of the assessments that are used. So, in schools that do what's called balanced literacy, which sounds really good because actually, balance is absolutely all you want in reading instruction. You want good teaching them how to read the words. But you also want them to be reading lots of books and gaining lots of knowledge and having balance between all those things. But in a balanced literacy school, what you will often find is that they have, like a leveled reading system, and they have an assessment system where they assign your kid a level. A, B, C, D, E. We talk in *Sold a Story* about some of the problems with that system. That assessment system isn't doing a good job identifying the kids who are struggling and isn't always telling you who's doing well, it's kind of, it's a little bit like rolling the dice. It's not a reliable way to tell how a kid is doing so I would want to hear more than a letter level. I wouldn't want them to be like your kid hits to level C, and we want them to be a level C by the end of kindergarten. I'd ask more questions. Okay, what do you mean? What is a level C? I'm not saying that it's necessarily a problem that your kids being given a level letter, but that is associated with a way of assessing and quantifying sort of reading skill that is deeply problematic. And kids really can sort of fake it. Especially kids with good language comprehension skills. They can sort of look like they're good at reading when the words are pretty short and they can memorize a lot of them. But if they don't really know how to get inside of word and sound it out and figure out what it is by looking closely at the word, things start to go kind of off the rails by third or fourth grade. Because the words get longer, the pictures go away, and they don't know how to figure out these words on their own.

Mike Caldwell It seems like this is a pretty objective issue at this point, like, you know, the research is out. You know, the science is out. It's been out for 50 years. But why are students still not being taught how to read? What is the issue here?

Emily Hanford: Well, I think more and more kids are. So things are changing. I think that's a hopeful thing. There's a lot going on. The science of reading is definitely on the minds of a lot of people in education, and even beyond, people are talking about it around the kitchen table. So, I think that's good. Um, you know, it takes a long time for research to make its way into practice in any field. So, part of what's going on here is that, it happens in medicine, too? Right? This is relatively new research for all of us who want to make sure that the kids who are in school right now get what they need. 50 years is a long time, but it takes a long time for research to get into practice, especially when it disrupts some very deeply held or commonly held beliefs. And I think that's true. I think that science of reading sort of disrupts some things that people are led to believe, like as long as you read enough to him and he's motivated to read, he'll become a good reader. And that doesn't... It's not true. So, science takes a long time for it to make its way into practice. There are deeply held beliefs about reading that are out there

that the scientific understanding disrupts. And so I think it is, I think it's a moment of reckoning for a lot of people. There are many teachers who've invested their time in certain approaches to teaching reading, and they're recognizing that there's a problem with that. So that's a difficult thing to face. There are school leaders who have invested time and money have gone to their school boards and said, “Buy X, Y or Z,” or “we are doing this,” and it turns out that wasn't quite right or wasn't quite enough. And so it's difficult. It's difficult for all of us to unbelieve anything we already believe in, or to admit we made a mistake about something... that's just hard. So, there is resistance in the system, and I mean, there's many other reasons. But education is so complex. We are talking about a gigantic system full of the most complicated things in the world. Human beings, right? With lots of levels of bureaucracy, lots of levels of accountability... or not. This is complicated stuff and the stakes are really high. So it's always hard to make change in a big system like that. So those are some of the reasons why. I think there are very few people who are doing that. There's no one out there who's like, “I don't want kids to learn how to read.” I haven't met those people, so I think even some of the people who've been promoting work that turns out to be at odds with the scientific research, I think they had the best interest of kids at heart, too. They thought what they were doing is right. But it's difficult when you really thought what you were doing was right to learn like, maybe it wasn't quite right. That's hard, right?

Mike Caldwell: Absolutely. So, then what? What's the call to action here? What do you believe in your research should be done? What advice would you give to that school leader? That's out there right now, and is listening to this, and is inspired to influence change and make change. What are some things that you would suggest?

Emily Hanford: So I think, talk to the other school leaders. Go learn from your peers, identify the schools that have, you know, are making changes. Because the school leaders have been writing about it. Lots of people have been writing about this. You see that they've made some dramatic improvements. Go ask them what's going on like, get involved in the conversation. Learn from the people who you wouldn't really most need to learn from to do this. So, if you’re a school leader, find the other school leaders. If you're a teacher, find the other teachers. Find the teachers in your district, find them on social media. If they're not in your district, find your people. If you're a parent with a kid who's struggling, find the other parents because at this point enough people have been through various iterations and are different stages of all of this, that there are a lot of people to learn from. So that's what I would say. As a journalist, I am not the person who's going to say like policy point 1 2 3 4 5. This is what you should do. I think there are other people who are more expert on that than I am. I am glad to see that there are really some good policy moves going on. I think there's always a delicate and balance between a sort of top, down, bottom up, kind of thing here, and that the best outcomes in education and policy in general are some important balance between the bottom up, saying, “Hey, something's wrong here we need help.” And then the top coming in being like “we got your back here, we're going to provide the resources. We're going to provide the leadership. We're going to help you do this.” And I think that is what's happening in a lot of districts right now, I think there's a lot of hopeful stories. So as a reporter, I want to stay on this and see what's happening. Look for schools that are really having some success. Find out what was successful and why and find out wasn't successful, and why and what can be done?

Better so? Because I think everyone has a reason. I'm a journalist. I'm also a citizen and a parent, and I hope to be a grandparent. So I really, really, want this story to end well.

Mike Caldwell: As a former principal, I was able to go in and see teachers and see all kinds of things happening, and I always loved to be able to see like things that were really working well and match those with things that maybe weren't working as well. And as you kind of mentioned in all the work that you've done over the last 20 years, I'm sure you've seen some bright spots all across our country of what's working well? Can you share just a few of those things that stick out to you as models or pockets of excellence, if you will.

Emily Hanford: Well, I'll say one thing that I remember seeing in one of the school districts I went to was in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. So, this was for the *Hard Words* documentary, which came out in 2018. And I remember going into a school there, and the principal had on the wall these big, huge post it notes because people were coming into the office all the time, and they were really hard at work at transforming their way. They were teaching reading, and they had "stop, start, and keep." Here's all the things we're going to stop doing. Here's all the things we're going to start doing. And here's all the things that we are already doing, that were great, that we're going to keep doing. And I keep hearing that from people. That's what they do. "Stop, start, keep". And I think it's really, you know, one of the things about education and especially when new policies get implemented. We're really good at like adding things on. Buy something new, add something on. Give a new, a new whatever. And teachers are getting completely overwhelmed by this. And they're experiencing so much whiplash, right? It's really important in education to understand that we have to sometimes take things away. And that's what I was trying to make clear in the *Sold a Story* podcast is, it's not just about adding phonics. It's about taking away some foundational ideas that have been problematic. And so stop, start, keep. Everyone's doing some really good things really well. Don't get rid of those things. But I think, though, I think that's the way to really prioritize.

Mike Caldwell: Yeah, I think that's just a good formula in general, whether it's in education or in life. It's take some time to do some inventory. It's, what should I start? What should I stop? And what should I keep doing? Yeah, I love that. That's very simple. And it's a great takeaway. This morning you talked about goal setting, and specifically in whether it's IRI data or Idaho data. But you know, really focusing on as opposed to, "let's get 90 here, but 0 here". Can you talk a little bit about what you're referencing?

Emily Hanford: You know, I think one of the things that we do in education is we set goals that are destined to fail. And I understand why we do it. But I'm hearing a lot of school districts who are getting into this quote unquote science of reading. Again, it's a body of research, it's not a thing you do. But I understand, so they're understanding this. And they're really trying to make changes. And they're saying things like, "in 3 years, 95% of kids are going to be proficient on X." And I think, "I don't think so. I don't think so right now." How many kids are proficient on that now? In many cases it's 50 56 62. You're going to have 95? No, you're not. You are not. Don't set a goal that you know you will fail at. What I would like

to say to everybody when it comes to things like test scores. I would really like to focus on the kids who are at the bottom, in the red, below proficient, below grade level. Below basic, actually on the NAEP scores, below basic. I think the research clearly shows us that we shouldn't have very many kids in that category. The research does not show us that 95% of kids are going to be proficient on something like NAEP. The research shows us that we can get 90 to 95, or even more percent of kids above basic. And if you actually go back and look at some of this foundational research that was done by the National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development, they've been doing long-term studies for years. That's what it shows. They are able to move most of the kids above the sort of 25, 30, or 35 percentiles. That is not proficient, but that is having those kids have good basic reading skills. And that's what we want. These kids can read. If they decide to make reading a big part of their life, if they fall in love with reading, that's their choice. We don't need everyone to love reading, we need them to know how to do it. We need to move the needle on the number of kids in this country who are functionally semi-literate. We just can't have that anymore.

Mike Caldwell: Absolutely. If could summarize what I've heard in this last half hour is, know what the body research says, know what the science of reading is, and set a reasonable goal. What you just talked about is absolutely that, and build a plan to do that, start. Figure out what you're going to stop, figure out what you're going to keep doing. What would you want to leave our listeners with if there was one thing that that you would really want to make sure you drive home? What would be that, that message?

Emily Hanford: How much teachers are really engaged in this. I think there has been a narrative in education around this topic in particular, and many that it's sort of anti-teacher. Especially when like, people come in and pass laws or policies that are anti teacher. What I'm hearing over and over again from teachers is, “Thank you. I didn't know this, and now I know, and I want to do better, and this is so exciting, and I am doing better, and I'm seeing it. I'm seeing the kids respond in a way that they didn't.” Before last week I was in Kansas, and I met a woman who's been teaching elementary school for 41 years. She has been on like a constant quest to try to figure out how to teach reading. She's done so many different kinds of training. She was like a whole language teacher, balanced literacy teacher, reading recovery teacher. She's done everything. She's just dying for someone to help her understand. And she's finally, over the past few years, really been able to understand this. She's like, I'm not retiring, because now I finally really know, this is working. I am reaching kids in ways that I never did before, and she like has, like a new lease on life in terms of her career after 41 years in the classroom. And wow, man, thank you to her. We have so much teacher turnover. We know that working conditions are such that many teachers are leaving the profession. Stay in the profession if you can. It's so worth it. And there are people out there that are searching and searching and searching, and they find it in year 39. And so, like let's let teachers find it in year two and stay in the classroom.

Mike Caldwell: Yes, absolutely. That’s a great story. Maybe just to summarize or just to finish here, what are some things you are going to be working on in the future?

Emily Hanford: Well, I feel like there is a lot to report on. I mean, I'm a reporter and there is a lot happening. So, I want to go out there and report on things. I actually want to help other reporters report on this. I spend actually a decent amount of time talking to other reporters and had a great conversation with a young reporter in California yesterday. Yeah, we need more good reporting on this. We need more documentation of what's happening. What's working? What's not? And I'm really excited about the fact that I think there are a lot of journalists really excited in this topic. So, the most important thing that I want to sort of keep working for because I want this story to end well, like I said. Too often in education, we sort of get really focused on something. And then, after a few years, we stop focusing on that and we focus on something else. And then our narrative is like, well, that didn't work. And I just think we've really got to stay on this one. This is not one we can ever give up on. And we have enough research to show us that if we keep at it and we keep adjusting to do it right, we can get it right. And I am hopeful, because I actually think there are enough people, parents and teachers, for whom this is one of the most important things to them. A lot of the other education initiatives you had previously might not have been their most important thing. This one really is. And so, I think they'll stay on it. So, I think it's a lot of people in the system not giving up. Hopefully, we'll be able to thank 10 or 15 years from now, when we see some real dramatic improvements. And I hope it happens. Yeah.

Mike Caldwell: Well, Emily, you do wonderful work. We have been super blessed to have the time with you today, and to learn from you. And for those that are listening, if you haven't heard of *Sold a Story* or looked at any of these podcasts, Emily, where would you send them?

Emily Hanford: Well, actually if you go, if you just Google *Sold a Story* and you find the *Sold a Story* podcast, you will actually find that the earlier podcasts I did are all on that feed now. We put them all in one place. So, there's 6 episodes of *Sold a Story*. And then there are the previous documentaries that we did that are on there and then there are 2 bonus episodes of *Sold a Story* that came out in the Spring as well. Along with one more which will be coming out in the next few months.

Mike Caldwell: And we will link those on our website as well. For us here at Bluum, and this *Bluum Together* podcast, this is the first of about 6 or 7 different episodes that we're going to be doing between now and the end of December that's going to focus on reading specifically in Idaho. We're going to be interviewing different school leaders that are those pockets of excellence around our state, and hopefully shine a light on those so that other people can learn from each other and from these leaders that are doing such a wonderful job. So, Emily, again, thank you so much for being part of our first *Bluum Together* podcast. We appreciate the time and learning from you today.

Emily Hanford: Well, I'm glad to be here, and I'm glad you're doing it.

Mike Caldwell: Thank you.