Theater as the Bridge: Prosody and Theater Methods that Increase Reading Comprehension and Student Engagement

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Theater as the Bridge: Prosody and Theater Methods that Increase Reading Comprehension and Student Engagement

Curriculum Project Designed by Douglas Miles

Statement and Guiding Question

- **Statement:** Many students struggle to connect to a text in English Language Arts because they have difficulty in understanding what they are trying to read; thus, making it difficult for them to make connections with the characters and events. This lack of reading comprehension causes their frustration to swell, and in turn hinders any potential engagement for the text.

- **Question:** How can I use theater-based instructional strategies to help students improve their reading fluency, engagement, and comprehension of the text?

Literature Review

**Prosody’s effects on Reading Fluency and Comprehension**

- "Prosody is one crucial component that needs to be addressed in reading fluency because it is the component that connects comprehension, or the making of meaning, to fluency" (Rasinski, Rich, & Johnson, 2009).

**Theater as the Bridge for Connecting to the Text**

- Theater forces the student to grapple with and discover meaning of a text through oral expression. It helps students learn about the novel’s events in addition to the more traditional approaches to literature studies (Brinda, 2008).

- "Theater strengthens reading comprehension because it acts as the vessel between the text and meaningful connections" (Inoa, Weltzek, & Tabone, 2014).

- Even though theater-based activities are not always acting out the play themselves, they are still learning how to convey emotions because they are listening to a speaker demonstrate oral expression (Young and Rasinski, 2009).

**Theater’s Impact on Engagement**

- Theater rekindles engagement because it immerses students in opportunities for insight, self-knowledge, and imagination (Brinda, 2008).

- Lessons with theater-based activities increased students’ interest in the lesson, which in turn increased their motivation to learn (Castelli, Queenon, and Thom, 2011).

Overview of Curriculum Design

- **Rubrics**

- **Speed-reading traps**

Conclusion

- Automatically needs to be assessed through not just reading rate, but also through prosody, which is the ability to have oral expression when one reads.

- Prosody is the oral expression component of reading that helps cement what we read into our cognitive capacity. In other words, while we read, our cognitive capacity can focus on word meaning instead of how fast we can read the text.

- The lack of reading comprehension due to being assessed through primarily reading rate can lead to the decline in student engagement.

- Theater-based instructional strategies are such a way to target the element of engagement because they have difficulty in understanding what they are trying to read; thus, making it difficult for them to make connections with the characters and events in the classroom; thus increasing their level of interest because the characters feel like they are within reach.

Standards Addressed

- **RL.9-10.1:** “Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.”

- **RL.9-10.2:** “Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.”

- **W.9-10.4:** "Engage and direct the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation, and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation, and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or opinion, and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or opinion, and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or opinion.”

- **W.9-10.5:** "Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.”

- **SL.9-10.10:** "Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.”

Theater-Based Instructional Strategies

- **Hot Seat:** The teacher or student acts as a character of the novel so that the rest of the class can ask them questions to gain a better understanding.

- **Role-play:** Students role-play events or as characters to enhance empathy, language proficiency, and communication skills.

- **Simulation:** Helps students learn about the novels events in addition to recreating similar experiences found in the novel.

- **Skills:** Increases student understanding of characters by creating a skill that captures a key moment in the story.

- **Readers Theater Workstations:** Several stations can be used, such as poetry, skits, and scriptwriting stations to help students creatively connect to the text by creating various products.

References


