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, Riordan, & 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 (Young and Rasinski, 2009).

**Theater’s Impact on Engagement**

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

A study on days with planned theater lessons showed a correlation to increased student attendance (Brouillette, Childress-Evans, Khirogi, & Farkas, 2014). Lessons with theater-based activities increased students’ interest in the lesson, which in turn increased their motivation to learn (Caufield, Queenon, and Horton, 2011).

Overview of Curriculum Design

- **Rubric**
- **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 prosody because oral expression is the foundation of theater.
- Theater-based instructional strategies have shown correlations between student engagement and reading comprehension because it is a novel way for students to connect to the text that provides the opportunity to become and/or interact with the characters in the text 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.9-10.3:** “Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.”
- **W.9-10.1.c:** “Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.”
- **W.9-10.3.a:** “Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation, establishing one or multiple points of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.”
- **W.9-10.3.c:** “Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation, establishing one or multiple points of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.”
- **W.9-10.5.c:** “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.9-10.6:** “Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.”

References