

Developing Literacy using Theatrical Pedagogies

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Author Note

A capstone project submitted to Thompson Rivers University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Education

Abstract

As an educator, I have witnessed firsthand how drama and oral language have been brushed aside in public classrooms as teachers place understandable priority on the core subjects and skills of reading, writing, and mathematics. This awareness has inspired me to further explore how theatre can positively affect a child's development and literary education. Using theatrical elements in literacy lessons will enhance students' success in reading and writing because it adheres to all types of learners; supports a positive learning environment; and complements and supports all aspects of language development. Teaching professionals are constantly attempting to find different ways to reach their students and support their literacy development and through the implementation of theatrical exercises and lessons, teachers can promote positive, engaging classrooms that meet the needs of all students. Learning to read and write is crucial in a child's development of critical thinking, exploration, and expression of self. Not being able to access, learn or develop these skills can spark frustration and behavioural issues within students. By exploring the effects theatre arts have on a child's literacy development and establishing teaching strategies that incorporate these theatrical elements, teachers will support the literacy development of their students through the incorporation of this theatrical pedagogy.

Keywords: theatrical pedagogy, theatre arts, literacy development, literacy education, oral language

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction	5
My Discovery of Theatre.....	5
Observing Drama in the Classroom	7
Struggling Literacy Learners	7
Presenting the Argument	8
Overview of the Paper	9
Chapter Two: Literature Review	10
The Struggling Learner	10
Effects Theatrical Lessons have on Literacy Development	12
Professional Limitations	15
Summary	16
Chapter Three: Application	18
Literacy Focused Drama Games	18
<i>Small Group Games.....</i>	<i>19</i>
TMATTY (tell me about the time you...).....	19
Fortunately/Unfortunately	20
I'm Thinking of a Word.....	20
<i>Whole Class Games.....</i>	<i>21</i>
Typewriter.....	21
That's Right.....	22
Categories.....	22
<i>Summary.....</i>	<i>23</i>

Group Performances	23
Speech Arts and Public Speaking	24
<i>Dramatic Readings</i>	25
<i>News Broadcasts and Reporting</i>	25
<i>Teaching a Skill</i>	26
<i>Persuasive Speeches</i>	26
<i>Presentations and Educational Speeches</i>	27
<i>Summary</i>	27
Summary	28
Chapter Four: Conclusion	29
Summary	29
Implications	32
References	34

Chapter One: Introduction

In the following chapter, I share my educational journey and how these experiences and learning have inspired me to focus my Capstone Paper on the topic of the literary benefits of a theatrical pedagogy. I share my personal teaching experiences and the observations I have made within the school system, and how these experiences further shaped the topic of this paper. Next, I discuss the significance of my topic by identifying the common challenges teachers experience regarding supporting students with literacy delays. Finally, I present the argument for my paper, consisting of the supporting evidence used, followed by a brief overview of the following chapters and events of my Capstone Paper.

My Discovery of Theatre

As I embarked on my educational journey through University, I chose to take an introductory theatre class as an elective to meet the requirements for my undergraduate degree. I had taken drama classes as a young child, though veered off that path once I entered Secondary School as I chose to focus my extracurricular time taking dance classes. In search of a dance elective, and discovering there wasn't one, I decided to take the risk and enroll in Introduction to Acting. This particular elective changed my entire educational journey, as Theatre then became my major and passion. The lifelong skills I learned from this program have shaped my teaching career and have inspired me to share my knowledge and experience to help educators in their own practice. Through my theatre experience, I gained confidence and improved my public speaking skills, improvisational skills, and social skills. My literary skills also developed as I learned how to understand and appreciate Shakespearean plays, and how to analyze stories and the characters within them. Establishing this appreciation for theatre arts has helped me in numerous ways, and was a massive asset when I entered the Bachelor of Education program.

Teachers are regularly speaking in front of large groups, improvising, communicating, performing, and enlightening students as they develop their knowledge.

Throughout my experience in the Master's of Education program, I have been able to incorporate my passion for theatre arts into my studies and research. One assignment allowed me to design a Public Speaking subject within the curriculum, branching off from the oral language aspect of the language arts curriculum (British Columbia, 2022). It was during this assignment that I made discoveries and developed observations regarding the teaching of oral language. I found that the teaching or instruction part of *how* to speak in public was forgotten as the expectation was for students to speak and present in front of the class as though it's a basic skill. This sparked inspiration, as I then continued to focus my future assignments around speech arts, and the incorporation of oral language within our teaching. By taking courses that allowed me to explore topics of my own interest, I was able to discover research and literature based on my developing passion for oral language teaching within literacy. Through my own observations and in the literature review I learned how theatre within the arts curriculum is so easily skipped or taught in one small unit. This realization further inspired me to find ways theatre arts can be incorporated more regularly and authentically in the classrooms as a cross-curricular educational tool.

While completing assignments for my M.Ed., I recognized that there were many avenues I could have taken regarding where to focus my topic for this paper. When designing the Public Speaking curriculum, my focus was primarily on the social, and individual benefits of being a successful public speaker. With this, I also discussed how it can support literacy development, which was a brief point I made to support my analysis. When it came to finding a defined topic for research, I had to narrow down my thinking and select one aspect of speech arts I wanted to

focus on. Having an extensive theatre background, I decided to focus on how theatre can easily be incorporated into the classroom to benefit students' literacy development. I felt the application of this knowledge by educators would be the most beneficial for effective student growth and development in literacy.

Observing Drama in the Classroom

As an educator, I have grown to learn that there is a drastic number of teachers who don't yet have an understanding of how supporting a rich education in drama and theatre arts can benefit their students (Baldwin & Fleming, 2003). Throughout my teaching career, I consistently hear how teachers struggle to include drama in their teaching, as it is out of their comfort zone, or they lack the knowledge to teach it effectively. Within my own school, I am often asked to support teachers and provide ideas regarding how to implement drama into their classrooms. Based on my own experience, it is often rare to see teachers incorporating meaningful drama lessons in their classroom, as they are often teaching drama because it's required and they are merely meeting one of many curricular requirements. Following my observations and conversations with fellow teachers, I have found a barrier to implementing authentic and purposeful drama lessons is that teachers do not find drama and theatre beneficial for their students. This awareness has inspired me to further explore how theatre can positively affect a child's development, and how it can be used as an asset across all classrooms and subjects.

Struggling Literacy Learners

Many children and youth face a variety of obstacles when learning to read and write which can lead them to fall farther and farther behind grade level and not obtain the knowledge necessary to be literarily successful (Merga, 2019). Starting as young as primary when students are first beginning to learn how to read and write, there are consistently students who struggle to

gain the literacy skills necessary for their grade level (Halonen et al., 2010). As the learning gap grows, this often results in various behavioural issues appearing within the classroom (Halonen et al.). Educators have established a variety of different teaching techniques and strategies aimed at resolving these issues (Stainthorp, 2020), yet many students are not receiving the effective support they need and are not being taught in a way that supports their style of learning (Merga).

Presenting the Argument

In this paper, I argue that theatrical pedagogies will enhance and support literacy development for the following reasons: theatrical lessons are engaging and support all types of learners; it explores language in a more interactive, hands-on environment; and it is attainable for all types of learners which encourages a positive learning environment. Based upon the following evidence I confirm that theatre and drama within the classroom can support student development and shape all students into confident learners. First, Merga (2019) explains that many children and youth face a variety of obstacles when learning to read and write which can lead them to fall farther behind grade level and not obtain the knowledge necessary to be literarily successful. Merga continues to explain how so many low-literacy students are being left behind as they are not receiving the correct support they need and are not being taught in ways that support their style of learning. Due to this evidence, a learning strategy needs to be developed that removes the pressures of formal reading and writing, and explores literacy in a more engaging, and interactive manner. Next, Dobson and Stephenson (2018) support the idea that the incorporation of a theatrical pedagogy in our daily literacy lessons can support students' development of reading and writing. They further explain how drama allows students to explore language and literacy more freely, as well as apply their dramatic experiences to their reading and writing (Dobson & Stephenson). Third, Duttin and Rushton (2018) further suggest that not

only does drama have a large focus on language, but that theatrical games and activities are also engaging and contribute to a positive learning environment as this style of learning is attainable for all types of learners. Based on this evidence, this paper will further explore and outline the benefits of incorporating theatrical lessons and strategies into literacy education.

Overview of the Paper

The following chapter consists of a literature review. In the literature review, I investigate common themes amongst those who are literarily delayed and the negative, long-term effects of these delays. During this literature review, I also explore the positive effects theatrical lessons have on literacy development by looking closer at multisensory learning; the benefits of a positive learning environment; and how theatre complements the literacy classroom. In the third chapter, I share how to apply theatrical elements to the classroom, and provide detailed descriptions of the academic benefit of literacy-focused drama games, group performances, speech arts, and public speaking. Finally, I conclude my paper with a summary and implications based on the findings within the literature and the application of theatrical pedagogies.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In this chapter, I summarize and interpret various pieces of literature that discuss and argue the cause and effect of being academically behind in literacy, and the effects theatrical activities have on literacy development. I also present literature that discusses the professional limitations of teaching drama, sharing reasons as to why theatre is not often utilized within classrooms. I conclude my literature review by summarizing the evidence and main themes presented in this chapter.

The Struggling Learner

In this section, I look closer into the cause of why some students struggle with literacy development. I continue by sharing research on the effects being literarily delayed has on student self-esteem and their educational future. This section presents the problems teachers face when teaching literacy, proving that an alternative teaching method needs to be instilled to reach all learners.

Hayes (2015) discussed a reading crisis among children, stating that “60 percent of fourth-graders and 60 percent of eighth graders struggle with reading in some manner and therefore require targeted instructional support” (p.3). Based on her research, Hayes explained that this reading crisis is an issue correlated to poverty and cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Lyon (2020) expanded on this thinking and explained that “children may struggle with reading for a variety of reasons, including limited experience with books, speech and hearing problems, and poor phonemic awareness” (para. 1). Connecting both Hayes and Lyon’s thinking, if students come from homes that cannot afford books, have parents that have English as their second language, or come from homes where literacy is not valued, these children will commonly struggle with all areas of literacy. Lally (2011) further supported this thinking as his

research explored the importance of the various experiences necessary during the infant and toddler stage for healthy brain development. He discussed that if there is a lack of books and connections through literacy, this commonly results in difficulty when learning how to read and write (Lally).

If students continue to struggle with developing their literacy, this could lead to the learning gap between students to grow. Welcome (2021) explained that “a learning gap is a discrepancy between what a student *has* learned and what a student was *expected* to learn by a specific point in their education” (para. 8). A child’s development during the infant to toddler stage is crucial for early vocabulary development, and Colker (2014) stated that by the age of 3 “there is a 30 million word gap between children” (para. 1) depending on literacy fertility in their environments. Teachers are welcoming students into Kindergarten, and the learning gap between their students is already prominent, and they must adapt their lessons to accommodate these students, in an attempt to eliminate and shorten these gaps (Hall, 2021). Research from one study discussed that this learning gap can result in stress toward learning and can create various behavioural issues throughout their school experience, as they exhibit this stress within the school environment. As students progress through grade school “the gap between struggling and capable students widens” (Merga, 2019, p. 371). The research done by Halonen et al. (2010) supported this by proving that this growing learning gap causes an increase in student behaviour as students’ self-esteem and attitude toward learning grow progressively worse. This behaviour and negative outlook toward learning typically develops and can progressively worsen over time, as students develop the awareness that they are academically behind as their social awareness grows (Hall). This can result in the student having severely low self-esteem, developing negative

relationships with their teachers, peers, and family, and eventually refusing to attend school altogether (Hall).

Literacy is the building block of education as we consistently need to read and write throughout various courses and subjects. By understanding the harm of having a growing learning gap, teachers can work to develop a rich and diverse teaching approach to support these struggling students and assist all students in their literacy development. Through the incorporation of theatre arts, teachers can use these lessons and strategies to help close this gap and adhere to each student's learning needs.

Effects Theatrical Lessons have on Literacy Development

This section explores the varying effects the incorporation of theatrical activities has on literacy education, and why it is beneficial for literacy learners. It proceeds by looking at how theatre ties into other aspects of literacy, and how it can support the development of a positive learning environment. This section continues with a look at the professional limitations teachers face when incorporating theatre in the classroom, which can be a cause as to why theatre and drama are not as commonly implemented within the classroom.

A multisensory approach, “also known as VAKT (visual-auditory-kinesthetic-tactile) implies that students learn best when information is presented in different modalities” (Moustafa, 1999, p.4). Moustafa explained in her research that multisensory education allows all learners to obtain a fair and equal chance for success as lessons cater to each of their learning styles. To fully immerse students in their learning, a lesson that uses a multisensory approach should consist of equal elements in which a student can hear, see, feel, and interact with their learning environment.

Baldwin and Fleming's research (2003) argued that drama and theatrical performance provides that "multi-sensory medium" which helps support all types of learners. They defended this argument by stating that "its participatory nature motivates and promotes effective emotional learning, which is the most easily remembered learning, whilst at the same time providing intellectual stimulus" (p.5). Through this interactive pedagogy, lessons will enable students to take their dramatic experiences and apply them to their reading and writing "by making a range of intertextual borrowings" (Dobson & Stephenson, 2018, p.2). Through the intentional inclusion of drama within the literacy classroom, Baldwin and Fleming stated that this will allow all types of learners to develop "active, interactive and reflective relationships" (p. 5) with their literacy learning, which in turn will aid in students achieving broad academic success.

The incorporation of drama lessons in the classroom can support a positive learning environment (Duttin & Rushton, 2018). Sithole (2016) discussed how a learning environment can help or hinder a student's learning achievement. By understanding the effects a teacher's lessons, attitude, and interactions have on a learning environment, teachers can then proceed to promote positivity, exploration, care, and understanding within the classroom (Sithole). This research continued to suggest that teachers explore various strategies of teaching to "uplift the performance of students" (p.10). By applying theatrical elements to our literacy lessons, research has shown that these engaging and interactive lessons not only foster growth in literacy and learning engagement but also have shown growth in the development of a positive classroom community (Duttin & Rushton, 2018). Drama not only encourages a positive classroom community by practicing multiple means of communication and engagement but also includes those students who perhaps struggle to make contributions to class discussions or projects (Wells

& Sandretto, 2016). The incorporation of dramatic teachings can assist in the establishment of one's classroom culture and promote positivity within the classroom as all learners have a role.

Theatre arts complements the language arts curriculum through its incorporation of oral language and exploration of written texts (British Columbia, 2022). The B.C. Curriculum (British Columbia) includes oral language as a part of the English language arts curriculum from Kindergarten to Grade 12 and states:

Through their study of language and texts, students have opportunities to develop a lifelong love of reading, writing, and learning and an appreciation for the power, beauty, joy, and artistry of language and texts. As they explore and create written, oral, and visual texts, students expand and deepen their understanding of both real and imaginary worlds, gaining insight into their own lives and the lives of others. (para. 2)

This exploration of written, oral, and visual language can easily be connected through the theatre arts as theatre arts activities can be presented as literacy lessons in the classroom to immerse students in a rich and immersive language education.

Baldwin and Fleming (2003) supported the argument that drama and literacy are connected and argues that when we consider language, we understand that language is reading, writing, speaking, and listening. All aspects of language need to be taught and should be linked to each other throughout one's teaching (Baldwin & Fleming). Their work explained that by incorporating dramatic themes into our teaching, educators are "extend[ing] the quality and depth of learning both in drama and in literacy" (p. ix). When we consider the skills that are learned through drama such as character development, descriptive language, and storytelling, we can identify how literacy and drama are connected and complement one another. This source discussed how drama promotes a creative way of thinking and supports students in their writing

as they grow to understand various literacy skills, as well as helps build students' overall confidence in their learning capability.

Additional research supported the incorporation of drama in the literacy classroom as teachers can use drama's strong focus on language as an aid to strengthen the development of their students' literacy skills (Duttin & Rushton, 2018). Drama provides students room to explore language and literacy more freely which allows them to make deep connections to their learning (Dobson & Stephenson, 2018). By incorporating drama into literacy lessons, students are receiving a diverse and well-rounded educational approach to language; are provided the opportunity to apply what they learn; and connect and build from their learning as theatrical pedagogies foster the connections between written, oral, and visual texts.

Professional Limitations

Throughout this research, a common limitation that is mentioned is teachers' lack of experience and expertise when it comes to confidently planning and teaching theatrical lessons and activities (Baldwin & Fleming, 2003; Wells & Sandretto, 2016). Teachers understand that there is a need for drama lessons in the classroom whether it be incorporated into language arts, or to achieve curricular arts requirements. Most teachers, however, struggle to confidently develop effective lessons (Baldwin & Fleming, 2003). Teachers commonly require ample support to build their confidence as many teachers lack the necessary training in order to teach drama effectively (Wells & Sandretto, 2016). Student performance is affected by a teacher's level of experience and expertise (Sithole, 2017), therefore having teachers who are knowledgeable and confident in their teaching is crucial for students' achievement (Stainthorp, 2020).

Though research lacked in identifying or explaining *why* educators avoid teaching drama lessons, it may be assumed that it stems from fear and lack of experience in public speaking outside of the classroom. Public speaking anxiety is common amongst many individuals (Ferreira Marinho et al., 2017) and since a main proponent of theatre revolves around public speaking and performing, perhaps this is the root of why teachers avoid teaching this subject to its fullest extent and benefit.

Teachers commonly lack the skills and confidence necessary to teach drama effectively. As a result, this limits their ability to effectively apply this teaching pedagogy to their literacy lessons (Baldwin & Fleming, 2003; Wells & Sandretto, 2016). To meet curricular requirements and provide their students with a rich and diverse education, teachers need to take advantage of professional development opportunities in theatre arts and seek supports so they can successfully apply this method of teaching to their classroom.

Summary

This chapter supports my argument that a theatrical pedagogy can enhance and support literacy development. Theatre and drama lessons incorporate elements of language and provides a multi-sensory way of learning which aids in the development of a positive learning environment. Though there may be some professional limitations revolving around the teaching of drama, by understanding its benefits we can begin to promote professional development and provide supports so all teachers feel confident and effective when incorporating dramatic elements into their literacy programs. By understanding how theatrical activities support literacy lessons, how it adheres to all types of learners, and how it promotes a positive learning environment, teachers can begin developing this style of teaching into their practice. The

following chapter explains and provides detailed examples of how teachers can apply drama seamlessly to their literacy lessons.

Chapter Three: Application

In this chapter, I share a variety of ideas and concepts that can be applied to literacy programs and teaching. Throughout my teaching experience and education, I have grown to learn that many teachers lack the experience and knowledge of how to effectively apply theatre activities and lessons in their classrooms. Personally speaking, when I attended University to become a teacher, there was only one course required and available on how to teach drama, occurring once a week for the duration of one month. We were provided with enough resources to make it through our practical work, but not to effectively teach and incorporate drama into lessons regularly. I argue that this short duration of time did not allow us to receive the resources required to provide higher-quality theatre lessons and have seen the first-hand gaps now into my teaching career. This chapter supports teachers by introducing concepts that can be applied to the classroom seamlessly, showing that you do not need to be experienced in theatre to incorporate these lessons into your teaching. In this chapter, I share theatre lessons, activities, and projects that can support literacy development. Based on my own experience and education, in this chapter, I share various ideas and their benefit starting with literacy-focused drama games, then proceeding to group performances, and ending with speech arts and public speaking projects. This chapter concludes with a summary, further connecting the application to the argument of how theatrical pedagogies support literacy development.

Literacy Focused Drama Games

When incorporating drama games into my teaching, I have witnessed firsthand how the stress and pressure of reading and writing slip away from students. Through this play-based pedagogy, students can interact and have fun with their peers while learning, brainstorming, and exploring language. Below I have provided examples of simple ways teachers can incorporate

drama activities into their literacy lessons, and promote creative ways of thinking that supports students in their development of reading and writing (Baldwin & Fleming, 2003).

Small Group Games

During small group games, students can work closely with their peers in a more private and intimate setting. This can help students who have public speaking anxiety, and provide a safe environment where students can try new things, and make mistakes without fear of class-wide judgment. In addition, these games further support the development of student confidence and involves each student, including those who may struggle with class participation and involvement in class activities and discussions (Wells & Sandretto, 2016).

TMATTY (tell me about the time you...). During this game, students will work in pairs. Students will decide who is partner A, and who is partner B. The teacher will then instruct partner A to ask partner B, “Tell me about the time you... went to outer space”. The challenge of this game is to tell a fictional story about the topic provided without stopping until the teacher announces that the round has ended (around 1-2 minutes). Once this round is complete, partners switch roles, and now partner B asks partner A the next question. Topics are presented by the teacher and can vary.

The purpose of this game is to explore creative thinking, as often students struggle to begin writing tasks because they often lack inspiration or ideas. This game proves to students that they do have interesting ideas, are capable of telling compelling stories, and can creatively draw from already established knowledge bases. Following this activity, the teacher can then proceed with a writing task and have the students write a fictional story about one of the topics they shared with their partner.

Fortunately/Unfortunately. This game involves students working in groups of three. Here they will work together to tell a story, one sentence at a time, alternating turns. Partner A will begin by starting the story with the first word of their sentence being, “fortunately”. For example, “Fortunately, I won a trip to go on a safari through the jungle”. It is now partner B’s turn and their job is to continue the story, though they must start the sentence with the word “unfortunately”; “Unfortunately it was pouring rain that day.” Then it is partner C’s turn and they continue the story and begin their sentence with “fortunately”; “Fortunately I was prepared with rain boots and an umbrella”. This flow and momentum, alternating between, fortunately, and unfortunately continues until the teacher ends the game.

This game is great for students to develop interesting conflicts and obstacles for their characters when storytelling. At an elementary level, students often leave out a challenge for their characters to overcome. This game shows students that incorporating challenges for our characters makes the story entertaining and interesting. Following this lesson, students can write stories, with the incorporation of conflict and challenges being the main writing goal.

I’m Thinking of a Word. In this game, students will work in groups of two-four. Here they will take turns thinking of words they can physically act out. Partner A begins, stating, “I’m thinking of a word that starts with S”. They then proceed to silently act out someone skiing. Their partner or group members then guess what they are doing. Once they have been guessed correctly, it is then partner B’s turn. They state, “I am thinking of a word that starts with P”, they then proceed to walk and act like a penguin. Once their word has been guessed correctly, the next player goes.

This game is ideal for young primary students, as they are working on developing their phonemic awareness. The incorporation of letter cards can be used, so the player can hold up the

card to add that visual piece to further connect to the students' understanding, of their letters and letter sounds.

Following each game, holding a class sharing session where students can retell the stories and highlights from the round is beneficial, as it not only builds student confidence but also incorporates the element of retelling and comprehension which is imperative for effective literacy development (British Columbia, 2022).

Whole Class Games

Whole class games will not only support students' literacy development but also help students in their public speaking as students will perform and/or speak in front of their class. These games can be altered to be voluntary or mandatory. Voluntary for students to participate in, or, as students develop their confidence, be implemented so every student must have at a turn to participate. The incorporation of whole class games promotes a positive learning environment as these creative and interactive lessons promote optimism, exploration, and care within the classroom community as students encourage and work with each other (Sithole, 2017).

Typewriter. This game requires three participants at a time. One student will be the “author” and the other two will be the actors. The audience will raise their hands and provide ideas for the setting, who the characters are, as well as a conflict they must overcome. Once a story structure has been set the student in the “author” role will sit to the side and act out like they are typing on a typewriter, and orally tell the story, applying the elements provided by their audience. As the “author” tells the story, the actors will act out the story as it is being told.

This game supports students learning of story structure, as well as the ability to comprehend the story being told. The student in the role of the “author”, will be developing their creative thinking and confidence as a writer. The actors will be working on their comprehension

and retelling skills. This game is excellent for the further targeting of literacy skills, as each role highlights different skills, so students who particularly need to work on comprehension can be assigned to the acting role, and students who are stronger writers or who are working on creative thinking and flow can be assigned as the “author”.

That’s Right. This whole class activity requires the teacher to lead the story. The teacher will begin telling the story and pause at moments looking for the students to fill in the blanks and finish the sentence. For example, “When Margret went swimming in the pool she looked down and saw...” here the teacher can pick a student to finish the sentence declaring what Margret saw. If the student says, “a shark!” the teacher continues with “That’s right!”, and continues telling the story from there, pausing at the next appropriate opportunity. No suggestion is declined or denied, unless outside of the pre-established classroom expectations.

This game can be used in both primary and intermediate grades, as it can be adapted so students are in the teacher role, leading the story. This game is great for inspiring students and sharing the joy of storytelling. This game can lead to a lesson where they collaborate with a classmate and write a story together, applying creative and interesting ideas, in a low-pressure setting.

Categories. Sitting in a circle, students pat their legs creating a slow beat. The teacher identifies a category, for example, flavours of ice cream. Students then go one at a time around the circle stating a different flavour of ice cream. The challenge of this game is that students must state their idea on the beat, without missing a beat, and they must not repeat a flavor that has already been said. If there are any repeats, or a student misses a beat, they are out for that round.

This game is great for vocabulary development, and the learning of various language skills as the category can be changed to fit an area of learning such as rhyming words, adjectives, genres, etc. This game also requires all students to participate which further includes students who may struggle to get involved in projects and discussions (Wells & Sandretto, 2016). Having full class involvement and participation further supports a positive classroom community as students are learning and working together through this play-based activity.

Summary

The implementation of drama games as a teaching tool will help assist students in their literacy development as it is attainable for all students which helps develop their confidence as learners. These games benefit all students as it incorporates all areas of learning; auditory, visual, kinesthetic, and tactile (Moustafa, 1999) and explores all aspect of language (Dobson & Stephenson, 2018).

Group Performances

As a teacher, I have witnessed firsthand, the positive effects group performances have on students. Students who typically refuse, struggle, or engage in reading activities flourish in their ability to be an active participant and take pride in being part of a team to present and perform something to their class or school community. Providing this collective team environment within the classroom further promotes a positive learning environment, which allows students to feel safe and comfortable facing challenges and trying new things (Duttin & Rushton, 2018).

Group performances, such as reader's theatre, choral speeches, skits, and plays benefit students' literacy development as it requires students to read texts aloud, where they can practice developing their vocabulary, fluency, and expression. Students can work together to decode, explore language, and rehearse their texts which further promotes a positive learning

environment as students are working as a team and collaborating on their ideas. As the culminating goal is to perform their given text, students will read the same text multiple times which supports their learning and literacy development. The “participatory nature” (Baldwin & Fleming, 2003, p.5) of group performances motivates students to immerse themselves in their learning and make a series of intellectual borrowings between each aspect of language and literacy (Dobson & Stephenson, 2018). These activities can be performed in front of small to large groups, which can further motivate students to try their best and apply their learning to their performance.

Students can immerse themselves in language, by reading, speaking, and performing various texts. Teachers can further challenge their students and expand their thinking by having them write their own scripts which can later be performed and provide purpose and meaning to their writing. Knowing that their writing will be presented or performed can be a motivator and encourage creativity in their writing to make their performance memorable for students, and encourage creativity. Sharing their work in this way can provide a sense of community within the classroom, as students are interacting and engaging in each other's learning, which plays an obvious role in the development of positive peer relations.

Speech Arts and Public Speaking

Each year, my school district has a Speech Arts competition, for this competition, students are to write their own speech and present it in front of a large audience and a panel of judges. The judges use various criteria to assess students on the delivery of their speech, which includes: content, literary form, clarity, pace, body language, and expression. Speech arts activities and lessons teach students various styles of writing and allows students to explore how written texts and oral language mutually affect each other.

Dramatic Readings

I love having my students perform dramatic readings in front of the class. This is a fun project which allows students to develop confidence as a reader, and study texts to learn various literacy skills through the exploration of the effects of punctuation, character applications, and typographical emphasis (British Columbia, 2022). Students are to choose a picture book, or a section of a chapter book, to present in front of the class as a dramatic reading. I encourage students to choose literature that has a lot of dialogue which allows them to play around with tone and expression from the perspective of different characters. This assignment is great for students to develop their fluency as they are re-reading the same text as they rehearse for their performance, and re-reading in a way that plays with different applications of expression and language use. Dramatic readings allow students to build their confidence as a reader and storyteller in an interactive environment.

News Broadcasts and Reporting

News broadcasts and reports can be used in a variety of ways and can be incorporated into various subject areas, where students have to research and learn about a topic such as a person, a historical or current event, a character from a book, etc. For this project, students are to write a report which they can present as if there were a news broadcaster reporting the news. This can be done as a live performance or filmed and shared electronically. This fun and interactive assignment will support students in their literacy development as it motivates students to effectively research and share their knowledge while also introducing them to informational writing. The theatrical performance element of this project provides students with a lesson that uses a multisensory approach by using elements they can hear, see, and interact with in their learning environment.

Teaching a Skill

Having students teach their classmates a skill, will not only develop their skills of procedural writing but also give them the opportunity to share with their classmates something that they are good at, which develops self-confidence and further supports a positive learning environment. From my own experience, I have seen students teach their classmates a dance routine, how to tie their shoes, how to make cookies, how to make a paper airplane, etc. This interactive and hands-on assignment provides students with a purpose for their writing and motivates them to participate and be an active member of their learning community. In addition, this assignment allows for the positive development of their self-identity which further develops their confidence as a learner, an individual, and contributing member of the learning community.

Persuasive Speeches

The writing and presenting of persuasive speeches is a great opportunity to educate students on effective speech writing, and public speaking. Providing real-life examples of when presenters are trying to convince and persuade their audience to think a certain way is beneficial as it further allows students to gain insight as to where writing and public speaking are used in daily life. Teachers can use politicians, lawyers, salespeople, etc. as examples of people who use language to persuade their audience and cause influence. As a teacher, when learning about Canadian politics, I have had students run for “Class Prime Minister” where they are to write a persuasive speech as to why the class should vote for them. When teaching primary, I had students write about why they think their favourite animal is the best. Regardless of the topic, incorporating the speech and performance element into their writing provides students with a hands-on, interactive learning experience which connects reading, writing, speaking, and listening. It also highlights the power of language in our day-to-day lives.

Presentations and Educational Speeches

It is easy to ask students to showcase their learning in front of the class without teaching the skill of presenting, as oral language is often assumed to be a basic skill. We mark students on their public speaking skills, such as volume, expression, eye contact, etc. though teachers often fail to provide students with the time, tools, and practice opportunities to ensure they are prepared for their presentations. By teaching and providing students with time to prepare, students can develop their writing, reading, and oral language skills. Beginning the presentation process by writing out what they are going to say during their presentation; reviewing and refining their work until they have developed confidence and fluency; and committing practice to the presentation product students can be assessed on their skills and understanding more accurately and fairly. Sharing with students about how they will be assessed based on their presentation features and then allowing time for students to write, and rehearse is key for success when presenting. Public speaking can be very nerve-wracking, and the more prepared students are, the more confident they will be. In addition, presentations and educational speeches enhance students' informational writing and solidifies their understanding of the curricular content being learned.

Summary

Speech arts and public speaking activities are beneficial ways to allow students to explore each element of language, through the rehearsal of reading, writing, speaking, and listening (Baldwin & Fleming, 2003). Through these hands-on and interactive activities, students are immersed in a multi-sensory way of learning where they can interact and explore in an audio, visual, kinesthetic, and tactile learning environment. By providing meaning to the lessons and allowing students to share their work, the incorporation of these theatrical performance elements

allows students to develop confidence as a learner, and establish a positive relationship with their learning community (Duttin & Rushton, 2018).

Summary

In this chapter, I have shared a variety of lessons, activities, and projects where theatre elements can be incorporated into the classroom. To summarize, students can participate in small group and whole class drama games; contribute to group performances such as reader's theatre, choral speeches, skits, and plays; and finally, prepare and present a variety of different speeches and presentations to enhance their literacy skills. Theatre games are a beneficial, multi-sensory medium (Baldwin & Fleming, 2003) where students can engage in literacy in a low-stress, play-based environment which particularly focuses on their creative thinking and vocabulary development. Group performances allow students to be a part of a team, and work collaboratively to interact and explore language, which further develops their fluency, expression, vocabulary, and confidence (Baldwin & Fleming). Speech arts and public speaking presentations explore writing, reading, speaking, and listening as students develop their speeches, read, and rehearse their speech until they ultimately present in front of their peers. Through the use of this multi-sensory way of learning, students can interact, share, and explore their learning in a safe environment where each student can achieve literary success. Applying the oral language element of literacy through incorporating theatrical teaching strategies consistently in the classroom will support students in the development of their reading, writing, and oral language skills. In the final chapter, I will summarize the preceding chapters, discuss how each chapter is connected, and share how my argument has been a success.

Chapter Four: Conclusion

In this paper, I argue that the implementation of theatrical pedagogies will help support children in their development of the literacy skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Research asserts that theatre arts creates a learning environment that adheres to all types of learners, promotes a positive learning environment, and immerses students in all aspects of language. In this final chapter, I look back at the previous chapters by; making connections between each chapter's themes; summarizing and highlighting the main points of literacy delays and difficulties; and outlining the positive effect a theatrical pedagogy has on literacy learners. Following the summary, I discuss the practical and theoretical implications of my paper based on my research and findings.

Summary

In the first chapter of this capstone paper, I introduce my discovery of drama and theatre, as well as my personal and educational history. Within this chapter, I share the story of when I became a teacher and the constant discovery of how little drama was taught or incorporated within classrooms. This experience and passion for theatre arts sparked the inspiration to share my knowledge and further explore the available research on the benefits of a theatrical pedagogy and how it can support literacy development. It is in this chapter that I share research and information about learning gaps and how it is common for children to cumulatively fall behind when learning to read and write (Halonen et al., 2010). Based on this information, I then present my argument where I argue that theatrical teaching strategies will enhance and support literacy development.

In the second chapter of this paper, I connect the argument to current literature where I present research that supports the argument and shares reasoning as to how a theatrical pedagogy

supports literacy development. The topics that I explore are: the cause and effect of delayed literacy development; how theatre adheres to all types of learners; how theatre can help establish a positive learning environment; and how theatre and the language arts curriculum (British Columbia, 2022) complement each other. The review of the literature identifies the need for an effective teaching pedagogy, as there is a serious reading crisis occurring in schools resulting in global learning disadvantages (Hayes, 2015). The literature review demonstrates how a theatrical teaching pedagogy supports a positive learning environment as all students are engaged in their learning (Duttin & Rushton, 2018). These lessons are attainable by all as theatrical lessons use a multisensory medium that adheres to all learning styles; visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile (Moustafa, 1999). The literature explores and proves that a theatrical pedagogy has literary benefits as it allows students to explore language more freely as they can apply their understanding across all aspects of language (Dobson & Stephenson, 2018).

In addition, I explore research that explains how drama can encourage a positive classroom community as it practices multiple means of communication and engagement and allows all students to work together and collaborate in a fun and interactive setting (Wells & Sandretto, 2016). In this chapter, I continue by sharing research that discusses how drama and literacy are linked together as it connects reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills (Baldwin & Fleming, 2003). Through drama's use of language and exploration of characters, stories, and texts, research supports the argument that through this theatrical pedagogy, students are developing a deeper understanding of literacy (Baldwin & Fleming). Finally, this chapter concludes with research that shares information about the professional limitations that affect the implementation of theatre in the classroom, as teachers commonly lack the experience and knowledge of how to effectively incorporate drama into the classroom (Wells & Sandretto,

2016). All the research presented throughout this chapter supports and connects to the argument of how a theatrical pedagogy can support a child's literacy development.

In the third chapter, I connect the literature from the previous chapter to my own educational journey and teaching experiences by sharing how teachers can apply a theatrical teaching pedagogy to their literacy instruction. Throughout this chapter, I share a wide variety of activities, lessons, and projects that can be implemented into the classroom that is attainable by all teaching professional, regardless of their theatre experience and expertise. This chapter begins with the sharing of several drama games which can be used as a tool to teach various aspects of literacy and language, and promote creativity and collaboration in an interactive, engaging, and play-based environment. This chapter continues by sharing ideas and the benefit of group performances and how reader's theatre, choral speeches, skits, and plays can develop an environment where students can work together to explore language and develop fluency in reading. Finally, we look at various ideas in which teachers can implement public speaking and speech arts. Here we look at a variety of speech arts activities and their literary benefit, as it incorporates writing, reading, speaking, and listening; all aspect of language and literacy.

This capstone paper has further supported my argument of when teaching literacy, a theatrical pedagogy can support a child's development of reading, writing, and oral language. Within this paper, I share ample evidence and literature that supports this argument. I clearly state how theatre arts can adhere to all types of learners, supports a positive learning environment, and complements and connects to other areas of the language arts curriculum (British Columbia, 2022). I support these findings by sharing ideas in which theatre can be seamlessly implemented into the literacy classroom and share how each activity or project can benefit a child's literacy development.

Implications

This paper shares both theoretical and practical implications that can be used by educators to support the development of a child's literacy skills. Theoretically, educators are commonly searching for a unique way in which they can teach students how to read and write (Stainthorp, 2020) though they are still missing many who are not receiving the correct support that adheres to their learning style. This theatrical pedagogies establishes new ways in which educators can support their students' literacy development and help in supporting our struggling learners. By understanding that there are students who continue to fall behind when developing their literacy, we can begin to identify how theatrical lessons and pedagogy can support learners when learning to read and write, as it incorporates all elements of language and provides a multi-sensory way of learning which also aides in the development of a positive learning environment. This teaching strategy engages students in their learning, through its interactive, and play-based lessons. It also encourages a collaborative and supportive classroom as students work together and share their learning with one another. The incorporation of drama "will offer ways for children to respond to and express their individual and shared understanding of a text in ways that give opportunity for an energized, yet reflective, individual, group, and class-collective response" (Baldwin & Fleming, 2003, p.5). Though there may be some professional limitations revolving around the teaching of drama, by understanding its benefits we can begin to promote professional development so all teachers can feel confident when incorporating drama into their lessons.

Practically, I would like to see educators embrace this teaching pedagogy and use this paper as a starting point for their own growth and professional development. I understand that theatre, drama, and public speaking can be intimidating and out of many people's comfort zones.

By implementing the ideas and activities provided in this paper, teachers can begin to understand that you do not have to be experienced in theatre to effectively incorporate it into their literacy lessons. I hope that through the exploration of my argument, teachers develop an understanding of how theatre can support students learning of literacy, how it can positively affect their outlook towards their education, and how they look at themselves as a learner. Continual and consistent implementation of a theatrical pedagogy across the curriculum can result in students not only developing their literacy to grade level expectations, but also establishing a love for learning, confidence, and social skills which all cater to a happy, optimistic, and engaged learning environment.

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