

Exploring the Intersection of Reading and Performing Arts

At foundry10, summer 2016, we are gearing up for another summer reading intervention with Shoreline elementary school. Second grade students in the shoreline district whose test scores put them below the third grade average reading level are invited to attend a month-long summer reading intervention course. In order to encourage student participation and affirm students' struggling with reading, the shoreline district leaders have partnered with us to add a performing arts element to their reading intervention curriculum.

But how do the performing arts enhance reading?

In fact, much research has been done to show the impact of the dramatic arts, for example, on the reading comprehension of elementary aged students. In a long study conducted by the Washington Education Department, Richard Deasy provides evidence that *metaplay* (directing peers in the acting out of a story) is critical to story comprehension. The study shows that students having the opportunity to design and act out their own plays and stories based on what stories they are read or hear, not only get to enjoy the cognitive challenges of engaging with the material in a more interpersonal way but also are proven to lead to better test scores in reading comprehension.

In the Journal of Educational Research, authors Dale S. Rose and others ran a study called Imagery-Based Learning: Improving Elementary Students' Reading Comprehension with Drama Techniques. Studying 3-5th grade students in various dramatic arts interventions they found the most effective tools for enhancing reading comprehension include the following: a. Imagery-based techniques such as dramatic arts techniques that emphasize visualization and imagination, b. segmenting a story to understand the meaningful relationships between the segments that create a whole story, and c. elaborating on the facts of the story such as understanding motivations and emotions the characters in the story are experiencing, or to make inferences on the story line or setting, as these practices involve a deeper level of processing of the information from the story.

Deasy, in the Washington department of education article, explains that acting out stories help students understand zone of proximal development, or ZPD. Students have to understand metaphor. An object is both a thing itself and also the thing it symbolizes. For example, a purse we are using as a prop to symbolize Little Red Riding Hood's basket is both a purse and the basket. Likewise, in acting out plays students are engaged in cognitive challenges like problem-solving. For example, they must shift from high level decisions such as, who will play the grandmother, to low-level decisions such as how to mime out an activity to help tell the story.

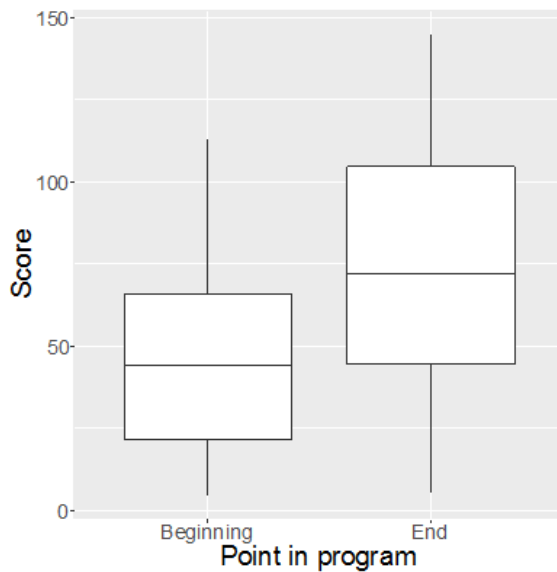
Much research shows that students are more likely to remember, retain, and recall information from what they've read if they have visual images to parse together the story. As a result, foundry10 intends to use also dance and film mediums to bring to life story for enhanced reading comprehension. Dance requires the use of memory to recall visual imagery and we intend to tell stories through our movement to increase comprehension of the material students are working on in their traditional reading classes. Some researchers suggest memory for visuals is stronger than memory for written information. The findings suggest that reading

comprehension is based on the ability to encode and retrieve basic building blocks or sentences and relate the meaning within them to scenes and stories from a text. In the study done by Dale S. Rose and colleagues, students who received the dramatic arts intervention showed significantly greater improvement on their reading comprehension and drama skills on general tests such as ITBS and the PA when compared to students who only had traditional curriculum. They found a strong positive relationship between the students ITBS reading comprehension scores as well as overall PA scores which suggest a correlation in verbal and nonverbal expression. This suggests that performances curriculum can be used as a means to measure reading ability.

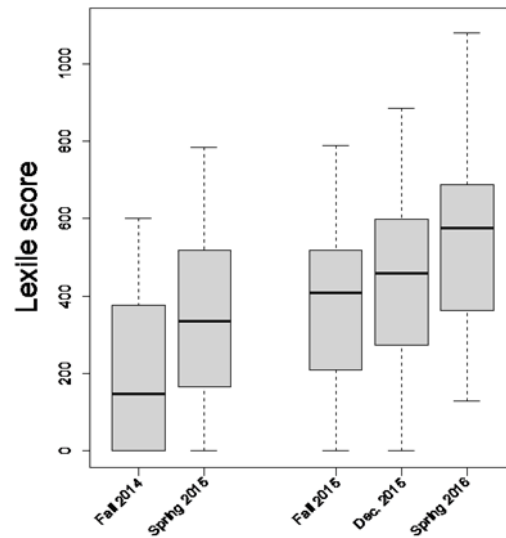
This summer, foundry10 used the existing research on reading comprehension and the dramatic arts to enhance the shoreline reading intervention curriculum through focusing on imagery, story-segmentation and elaboration. Our curriculum will also capitalize on student memory of visual imagery as well as on the cognitive challenge of interpersonally connecting with the material through student performance creation and directing of peers. With foundry10, students bring the stories they're reading in class to life through the use of dramatic arts. They elaborate on the known stories, adding characters or scenes, to engage with the material in a more personal way.

Foundry10's partnership with Shoreline provides us with an exciting opportunity to further explore the intersection of curriculum in performing arts and reading comprehension. Our first summer we taught third grade and ELL and used dramatic arts, dance, and film to enhance the traditional classroom curriculum. This summer we have expanded into K-3 classrooms and are running multiple classes in dramatic arts techniques. Last summer, research showed an increase in student perception of their skill in reading and an overall increase in their academic success not only for the month-long intervention (through pre and post assessments) but throughout the course of the year. The findings suggest its possible students who accepted the invitation to participate in the summer reading intervention with the dramatic arts curriculum augmenting their traditional curriculum, scored higher than they would have if they had not attended the program. The degree of increase is admittedly slight, but it is nonetheless present.

*Nonsense Word Fluency test scores
before and after drama program*



*Lexile scores for drama
program participants over time*



There is still much research out there showing the impact of dramatic arts pedagogy in the classroom environment and we hope to be on the cutting edge of exploratory practices in making an impact in classrooms with our resources and specialists in our exploration of its effect on reading comprehension.

Works Cited:

Dale S. Rose, Michaela Parks, Karl Androes, and Susan D. McMahon (2000). Imagery-Based Learning: Improving Elementary Students' Reading Comprehension With Drama Techniques, *The Journal of Educational Research*, 94:1, 55-63, DOI: 10.1080/00220670009598742.

Deasy, Richard J., Ed. Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Development. Arts Education Partnership, Washington, DC. Department of Education, Washington, DC.; National Endowment for the Arts (NEAH), Washington, DC. ISBN-1-884037-78-X.

Bridget Kiger Lee, Erika A. Patall, Stephanie W. Cawthon, Rebecca R. Steingut. (2015) The Effect of Drama-Based Pedagogy on Pre-K-16 Outcomes: A Meta-Analysis of Research From 1985-2012. *Review of Educational Research*, 85:1, pp. 3-49, DOI: 10.3102/0034654314540477.

Bridget Kiger Lee, Erika A. Patall, Stephanie W. Cawthon, Rebecca R. Steingut. (2015) The Effect of Drama-Based Pedagogy on Pre-K-16 Outcomes: A Meta-Analysis of Research From 1985-2012. *Review of Educational Research*, 85:1, pp. 3-49, DOI: 10.3102/0034654314540477.