USING PUPPETS AS STORY PROPS FOR READ-ALOUDS: ADDRESSING READING/LEARNING STYLES

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This article describes the Mother Phonics program as implemented at the Augusta University Literacy Center. A description of the program as well as the Center’s facility is offered. The daily schedule and instructional techniques are highlighted. The instructional design embraces the unique learning styles and preferences of struggling readers. The use of read-alouds, puppetry, and music is also referenced.

When you enter the Augusta University (AU) Literacy Center, you are apt to see children involved in a phonetic literature based puppetry reading program. As the energetic young children gather on the rug in large group early in the morning, you will witness the anticipation on each young face as they look toward the Mother Phonics Puppet. Mother Phonics is the mother of the 26 puppet children who represent the 26 letters of the alphabet.

Mother Phonics ignites more excitement as the lesson begins with a chant: “Mother Phonics is here! Mother Phonics is here! Little children gather near! She has some stories she wants you to hear!” Mother Phonics might be telling the story of how “Bb” got his name and sound. As she tells how “Bb” likes to bounce his ball, everyone participates doing a bouncing ball motion as they make the bouncing ball “Bb” sound, b, b, b...The song Mother Phonics sings, “Where is My Puppet Child?” to the tune of (“where is thumpkin?”) has them up dancing and singing with Mother Phonics. They may be singing “clappity clap” (Smith & McGee, 2005).

This process continues at the AU Literacy Center as the children learn letter-names and their corresponding sounds. They are having so much fun they do not realize they are learning to read. In one of the activities at the AU Literacy Center, the children make a paper puppet, so they can share at home their story, Mother Phonics chant, and song with parents. The puppet will go home with each child in a puppet theater that was made at the Literacy Center using two brown paper bags. The puppet and the theater will be returned so more puppets can be sent home.

You may also find the children in the large classroom theater manipulating the cloth puppets as other classmates watch the performance. Even the child who is the shyest can be found in the theater participating in role playing. The puppets have the upper case letters on their noses and the lower-case letters in their eyes. Also, each puppet wears an object on his or her clothing that depicts the letter sounds as bouncing ball “Bb” wears a “b’’all. Through role playing with the puppets, all styles of learning are addressed.
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When returning to the rug for story time, Mrs. Linda Smith, the teacher/creator of the Mother Phonics program, reads a book about playing “b” all such as “Stop That Ball”. Other books about balls will be read at the Literacy Center. The children will also read about many “ball” games such as football, basketball, volleyball, dodgeball, softball, tetherball, and racquet ball in read-aloud experiences. A class graph will be made on “Our Favorite Ball Game”. At the Literacy Center’s listening station, the young children will listen to more books about ballgames. At this station, words beginning with “b” can be repeated to reinforce the sound. Wipe-off boards are provided for them to practice drawing a circle to make a ball. At this time, the drawing alphabet lower-case letter “b” will be demonstrated making a bat out of the stick on the “b” and a ball out of the circle on the “b”.

Next, the class will be introduced to the letter/word detective game at the Detective Station. In the Detective Station, each child will make a detective kit using a manila folder, footprint cut-outs with letters or words on them, plastic magnifying glass, and a laminated detective cap. This kit can be used in different ways such as matching upper-case and lower-case letters, recognizing letters, and matching letters with picture of objects that begin with the corresponding letter sound. Also, the kit can be used to sound out simple three-letter short-vowel words such as mop, bat, and cap. These words will be written on the footprints.

Accommodating styles of learning to read through a research-based puppetry program aids struggling readers of all ages (Carbo, 1997). All children possess unique styles in terms of their learning strengths and preferences. Teachers or tutors must match teaching styles to learning styles. The gap between the global and analytical learner and the impulsive versus reflective learner is bridged during these performances (Kagan, 1965).

According to Carbo (2007), a struggling reader is impacted by different learning and reading styles. These include: 1. the overall reading environment, 2. personal emotional needs, 3. sociological preferences, 4. physical needs, and their means of processing new information (Dunn, Dunn, & Treffinger, 1992).

Just as each of us has a unique finger print, so, too, do we have unique styles of learning to read, which is impacted by choices of instructional methods, strategies, and resources. Dunn and Dunn (1978), have spent decades researching learning style preferences. Dunn and Dunn recommend that teachers and tutors accommodate learners who prefer styles of learning that are global versus analytic and reflective versus impulsive (Kagan, 1965). The majority of young students and at-risk readers are primarily global learners (Carbo, 2009).

Interactive read-alouds provide an avenue for enhancing children’s language for thinking and understanding (Lenox, 2013). The use of repeated interactive. Read-alouds in both preschool and kindergarten are valuable (McGee & Schickendanz, 2007). Tutors and reading teachers do well when bringing literature to life with puppets. Using puppets to retell stories helps to build narrative skills; marionettes work well for this. The performing arts inspire puppet performances that provide young children with positive experiences with books and stories. Puppetry nurtures children into becoming confident, eager, young readers (Dunn & Dunn, 1978).

Promoting young children’s interactions with story book reading may be enhanced through puppets and music (Richards, 2010). Wiseman (2011) recommends interactive read-alouds to enhance constructing literacy knowledge.
Bibliography


Literature Cited and Recommended


