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# The Use of Theatre as an Instructional Strategy in the Content Areas for Students with Reading and Learning Disabilities

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Theatre is a powerful tool for organizing one's experience. It is an instructional technique that motivates students as they seek to understand and communicate their learning. This article provides a foundation for using theatre as a learning strategy in the content areas for students with reading and learning disabilities, using metacognition as an important factor. Theatre addresses three prerequisite conditions for metacognition: information processing capacity, domain-specific knowledge, and motivation. This article describes research that supports the use of theatre-based learning as a way to strengthen perceptual skills, improve retention of new information, and to promote positive affective states, active student engagement, and reading comprehension. An example of implementing theatre-based activities in social studies instruction is described.

Theatre helps students *make sense of the world and of the messages coming in through the senses* (Smith, 2001, p.12). As an instructional technique theatre can provide an engaging way for students with learning disabilities to interact with new concepts, while concurrently aiding in retention of this information. However, in many content area classes students are required to learn by reading. This can be problematic because eighty percent of students with learning disabilities have specific deficits in reading (Lerner, 2003; Lyon, 1995; Lyon & Moats, 1997).

In this article, theatre is offered as an alternative instructional strategy for teaching in the content areas. The theory behind using theatre as a learning strategy derives from research that indicates students with learning disabilities show a variety of metacognitive deficits in reading (Brown, Bransford, Ferrara, & Campione, 1982; Dufresne & Kobasigawa, 1989; Paris, 1987), which interfere with the ability to acquire new information from the textbook. However, theatre can be used to address the prerequisite conditions necessary for metacognition in ways that promote greater understanding of content area concepts. The following section provides a rationale for using theatre to address these metacognitive preconditions.

## Metacognition and Reading

Metacognition *has been used to refer to an executive function that selects, controls, and monitors the use of cognitive strategies* (Kuhn, 1992, p. 248). Students with learning disabilities have been found to exhibit metacognitive differences (Torgesen & Licht, 1983). Research suggests that the ability to engage in metacognition is what distinguishes good readers from poor readers (Deshler, Ellis, & Lenz, 1996). That is, good readers (a) actively check their comprehension throughout the reading process, (b) reread or slow down as needed, and (c) can hold inconsistencies in short term memory for longer periods than can poor readers.

In contrast, students with learning disabilities and reading problems have been found to (a) have less prior knowledge to bring to new information (Stanovich, 1986), (b) be less aware of variables that interact with reading (e.g., new vocabulary, poor attitude; Deshler, et al., 1996), (c) be less sensitive to text features (e.g., headings, organizational layout; Deshler, et al., 1996) (Wong & Wilson, 1984) (d) not monitor their own comprehension (Billingsley & Wildman, 1990; Bos & Filip, 1984; Palinscar & Brown, 1987), and (e) have minimal reading strategies and not sufficiently use the strategies they have (e.g., summarizing, scanning; Deshler, et al., 1996).

To successfully engage in metacognitive behaviors, students must be able to meet three prerequisite conditions. That is, students must have (a) adequate information-processing capacity (Denckla, 1994), (b) domain-specific knowledge (Denckla, 1994; Siegler, 1991), and (c) sufficient motivation (Kistner & Torgesen, 1987; Licht, 1993; Schunk, 1989). Each of these is reviewed in the next section, followed by an explanation of how theatre strategies address each area.

## Information Processing Capacity

The Information-processing Model refers to one's ability to take in and store information, as well as how one uses this information to create new knowledge. According to Bryant and Bryant (1998), *stuff goes in, stuff goes round and round, and stuff comes out again*. Adequate information-processing capacity depends, in part, on the speed of one's processing which, in turn, depends on the (a) number of operations involved in a task and (b) the basic processes required for a task (Hale, 1990).

For example, suppose a student is asked: How did resources play a part in the outcome of the Civil War? This question requires the student to answer several sub-questions (operations), such as: *What is a resource? What was the out-*

come of the Civil War? and What were some resources people had back then? That is, the rate of processing speed diminishes with the complexity of the question. However, students with learning disabilities show limited vocabulary development (Gerber, 1993; Wiig & Secord, 1994), and deficits in automatic memory (Lyon, 1994). Therefore, it is not surprising that these students have been found to exhibit slower processing speed than their peers without such disabilities (Felton & Wood, 1989; Torgesen, Kistner, & Morgan, 1987; Wolf, 1991).

#### Perception

Adequate information processing capacity also depends upon the basic processes required for a task. Perception can be considered a basic process and refers to one's ability to recognize and interpret new information. Perception includes elements that underlie reading problems, such as discrimination. For example, children with auditory perception difficulties are likely to have difficulty decoding words (Lerner, 2000). Slower processing speed for verbal information (e.g., auditory discrimination during teacher lecture) (Felton & Wood, 1989; Torgesen, et al., 1987; Wolf, 1991) has also been documented in students with learning disabilities. In other words, higher-level metacognitive behaviors (e.g., comprehension monitoring) are contingent upon lower level processes (i.e., perception). If content area tasks are presented via reading or lecture, many students with learning disabilities will be unable to acquire new information.

For students with learning disabilities who have trouble recognizing and making sense of new information, theatre can help. As Sally Smith (2001) says, *the arts help organize experience. They help make sense of the world and of the messages coming in through the senses* (p. 12). Theatre can be used to strengthen perceptual skills because to watch or participate in theatre involves learning to look, to listen, and to remember images.

#### Memory

Adequate information processing also depends on memory functions. Specifically, working memory is crucial for metacognition. Working memory is the ability to hold information in mind while processing new knowledge and also involves retrieving information already stored in long-term memory. Retrieval depends on how well a student learned something to begin with and is also referred to as automaticity. Students with learning disabilities have been distinguished on tasks that measure working memory and automaticity (Lyon, 1994). Automatic memory for sight vocabulary (speed of processing) has been found to be the most important predictor of reading comprehension in students with learning disabilities (Meltzer, 1991, 1993; Meltzer, Fenton, Ogonowski, & Malkus, 1988). In our earlier example, if the definition of the word *resource* is not automatic for a student, then that student's processing time would be spent figuring out what *resource* means instead of

allocating sufficient energy and time to the higher level question being asked.

In addition, students with learning disabilities have problems remembering verbal information (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 1998), unless they are provided strategies that allow new information to remain in working memory for longer periods of time. Unless information is placed into long-term storage, it will decay or become lost (Swanson, 1987; 1996). That is, students with learning disabilities require learning activities that necessitate their active versus passive engagement.

Using creative drama to teach reading has been found to increase recall (memory). Students who physically acted out sentences using real or imaginary objects recalled sentences better than those who just verbalized the sentences (Ranger, 1995). Similarly, students who acted out action words (e.g., swing, stretch, push, pull) were able to recall the words more quickly and more consistently than students who simply read the words aloud (Moffet & Wagner, 1976). For young children (K-2), students who enacted a story following a teacher's reading of the selection had greater recall of both story events and sequence than students who participated in a story discussion or drawing condition (Pellegrini & Galda, 1982).

The reason for findings of improved reading retention under theatre-enactment conditions may be attributed to the multi-sensory input drama affords. Theatre allows students to take in new information through many sensory channels, such as auditory, kinesthetic, and visual, increasing the likelihood that information will be remembered and stored in long-term memory.

Findings from research on induced positive affect also support the value of using drama to improve recall. Induced affective states have been shown to influence cognitive processes such as memory (Laird, Wagener, Halah, & Szegda, 1982; Nasby & Yando, 1982; Natale & Hantas, 1982). Fifth-grade children induced in positive mood learned more reading vocabulary words than their neutral counterparts (Bryan & Bryan, 1991). That dramatic learning strategies do elicit positive affect is supported by research showing students' enhanced literature enjoyment (Bidwell, 1990; Cox 1988), increased motivation (DeRita & Weaver, 1991) and preferences for interpretative dramatics versus traditional approaches to teaching reading (Henderson & Shanker, 1978). In sum, theatre appears to enhance memory because it is multi-sensory, and it contributes to positive affective states.

#### Attention

Two other influences on information processing ability include (a) the ability to attend, and (b) instructional approach. The ability to attend to new information is contingent upon both selective attention and sustained attention. Selective attention (focus-execute) *is the ability to select tar-*

get information from an array for enhanced processing (Mirsky, 1987) or to narrow the field of stimuli to which one is attending or reacting to those that are deemed important or relevant to the task while ignoring those that are not (Barkley, 1994). Between 20-40% of students with learning disabilities have Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD) (Goldstein, 1995). Students with AD/HD have been found to selectively attend to novelty in color, and changes in size and movement (Copeland & Wisniewski, 1981; Radosh & Gittelman, 1981). A student with AD/HD who is seeking out novel stimulation from the environment may miss out on important auditory information provided through the teacher's lecture.

Sustained attention refers to the *capacity to maintain focus and alertness over time* (Mirsky et al., 1991, p. 112). Sustained attention may depend, in part, on the number and quality of competing interests present in the learning environment. It is the *stick-withitness* of attention. Zentall (1993) suggests that because students with AD/HD have trouble remaining attentive under conditions of decreasing novelty (e.g., boring or repetitive tasks), difficulty in sustained attention is a secondary problem resulting from an attentional bias favoring novelty. Applying what we know about attention to the content area, many students with learning disabilities may have difficulty attending to new information primarily because of the way it is presented, that is, through lecture or textbook reading. Introducing novel learning tasks should produce positive effects on both selective and sustained attention.

The argument that theatre-based strategies improve attention is derived from the fact that theatre is active, or *experiential*, according to Viola Spolin, pioneer in creative dramatics (Spolin, 1985). Active learning promotes attention, increases on-task behavior and decreases incidents of negative behavior (Borich, 1992). Experiential or hands-on learning has been an effective instructional strategy in the science content area (Saunders & Shepardson, 1987) and has been recommended as a fundamental instructional strategy for inclusive education (Johnson, 1999). Strategies that engage students actively in their learning also promote academic achievement (Algozzine, Ysseldyke, & Campbell, 1994).

Merely being an observer of drama may not be sufficient for maximum learning, however. For instance, children playing roles from stories that had been read to them and which required more active involvement had better total recall scores than those who had less active role assignments (Pellegrini & Galda, 1982). In other words, theatre offers an opportunity for full engagement and may help students who have a high need for activity channel their energy productively.

### **Instructional Approach**

An educator's instructional approach influences

whether students with learning disabilities allocate their attention passively or actively. For example, teachers who use strategies such as active response formats (choral reading, dramatic enactment) facilitate active attention from their students. Increased engagement and decreased off-task behavior has been documented when active student response has been integrated during whole class instruction (Narayan, Heward, Gardner, & Courson, 1990; McKenzie & Henry, 1979). The success of active student response may be attributed to the fact that students receive (and interact with) new information through the kinesthetic channel, in addition to visual and auditory channels, which may help students maximize their attentional capabilities.

### **Domain-specific Knowledge**

The second prerequisite condition for metacognition is having and accessing domain-specific knowledge. In fact, developmental research indicates that one's level of knowledge within a given domain influences the quality of one's metacognitive functioning on tasks within that domain (Lyon, 1994; Schneider, Korkel, & Weinert, 1989). Using our earlier example, students who already know something about the Civil War would have an advantage when it came to learning new information about this topic.

Unfortunately, students with learning disabilities may have less domain-specific knowledge for many reasons. First, the repeated failure of many students with learning disabilities makes them less apt to apply themselves to academic tasks in which domain-specific knowledge can be acquired, such as reading. Secondly, many parents and teachers over help these students, leading to learned helplessness (Stone & Conca, 1993). Deficits in attention, as discussed earlier, also prevent students from accessing domain-specific information. Finally, students may experience problems at the working memory stage. That is, they may not have sufficient opportunities to interact with new information so that it can be stored well into long-term memory. Learning activities in the content areas must be useful in activating students' prior knowledge to assess what they already know about the lesson. Also, these activities must enable students with learning disabilities to build up domain-specific knowledge.

Theatre does this. Because students get the chance to interact more fully with new concepts and to use what they already know in the process of role-playing, there is a greater likelihood that domain-specific knowledge will be activated or formed. *Acting out* has been recommended as a method of teaching students, not only to retrieve information, but also to understand and to transfer it in order to find possible relationships and to create new generalizations and analogies (Perkins, 1991). In addition, teachers can use theatre activities to assess what students already understand about a concept. For instance, drama has been found to be a dynamic diagnostic tool for identifying students' incomplete

conceptions about science content as well as a means of enabling students to revise these misconceptions to fit with currently accepted scientific knowledge (Kase-Polisini & Spector, 1992). Furthermore, because students learn concepts or review concepts through their role-play, they have a stake in their learning so they are more likely to be attentive to the learning process.

### Motivation

The third prerequisite condition for metacognition is motivation. Students who do not realize their failures are a result of insufficient effort are not persistent (Diener & Dweck, 1978). Therefore they are less likely to discover strategies that are effective on learning tasks. Relatedly, students with learning disabilities, compared to their nondisabled peers, have been found to more frequently attribute failures to low ability versus insufficient effort (Butkowsky & Willows, 1980; Licht, Kistner, Ozkaragoz, Shapiro, & Clausen, 1985; Pearl, 1982). They are also less likely to take credit for successes and more likely to attribute successes to luck or an easy task (Pearl, 1982; Pearl, Bryan, & Herzog, 1983).

General motivational problems due to repetitive learning tasks (Zentall, 1985; 1986) and repeated school failure (Blackorby & Wagner, 1997; Wagner, 1990) also impact degree of motivation. Motivating students to learn remains an important consideration in content area instruction.

Fortunately, creative dramatics turn students on because they do not resemble paper and pencil tasks. Also, students who have difficulty learning to read may never associate reading with pleasure and, therefore, do not want to read (O'Shea & O'Shea, 1994). By making reading fun, theatre motivates students to learn. In a report examining data from the National Educational Longitudinal Survey (Catterall, Chapleau, & Iwanaga, 1999), motivation was one of several areas in which low SES youths involved in theatre demonstrated gains when compared to students who were not involved in the theatre arts.

### Research on Drama and Reading Comprehension

Good readers and poor readers have been distinguished on their ability to use mental images (Jacob, 1976). Fourth and fifth-grade readers who scored 1-2 years below grade level on the California Achievement Test and were taught to use mental imagery were more successful at monitoring their comprehension (better able to identify both explicit and inferred inconsistencies in text) than poor readers who were exposed to traditional comprehension instruction (Gambrell & Bales, 1986).

Other studies that involve the use of theatre activities also support the use of imagery-based learning for reading comprehension over traditional reading approaches. For instance, using creative drama versus traditional instruction

(vocabulary and story discussion) with fifth grade remedial readers was found to increase story comprehension scores on the Metropolitan Reading Comprehension Test (MRCT) (DuPont, 1992). These readers also demonstrated consistent improvement over the six-week intervention as measured by criterion-referenced test items and these gains were significantly higher than the control group's scores. The gains on the MRCT were demonstrated even though content during instruction differed from the content included on the test. Researchers theorized that students in the drama group gained practice in creating clearer mental images of written material when asked to act out what they had read.

Similar results were demonstrated for inner city fourth graders who were taught to dramatize a story versus students exposed to the standard school reading curriculum (Rose, Parks, Androes, & McMahon, 2000). Each intervention consisted of hourly sessions twice a week for 10 weeks. Students in the drama intervention improved an average of three months more than controls in overall reading scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), and their scores were significantly higher than controls on the factual comprehension subscale of the ITBS. Scores on a performance-based measure of ability to dramatize the actions of the main character in the story were also found superior for students exposed to drama versus the control group from pre-to posttest.

Using a wider age span of students (grades 2 through 8), from 12 elementary schools, positive outcomes were again demonstrated on a standardized test of achievement (Gates MacGinitie Test of Reading) for students who received 3 months of drama story application (Whirlwind, 2000). In fact, students improved their reading skills by an average of 4.6 months within 3 months of instruction, even though national norms predicted just 2.6 months' improvement.

Theatre strategies may be beneficial for improving reading comprehension because the skills needed to enact a story are those needed for reading. A student involved in a drama activity will be "*called upon to practice several thinking skills such as: inventing, generating, speculating, assimilating, clarifying, inducing, deducing, analyzing, accommodating, selecting, refining, sequencing and judging*" (McMaster, 1998). These are fundamentally the same skills required for reading comprehension. In attempts to enact a story, students need to internalize character motives, understand the setting and be aware of the problem or conflict, the same skills involved in making sense of historical events in social studies reading materials. Strategically, reading has a purpose because students need to gather information about characters and famous persons from other sources, and they will skim material to find out this needed information. "*When children dramatize a story, they make inferences about reasons for the actions of the characters, they understand characters' emotions, and can identify the incidents which lead to the main events of the story*" (Ross & Roe,

1977). That is, students are asked to bring more of themselves to their reading comprehension, thus increasing their involvement with the text (Bidwell, 1990).

In sum, theatre as an instructional strategy assists in the processing of new information by enhancing information processing capacity, building domain-specific knowledge and increasing motivation. Furthermore, it does this by activating mental images necessary for more complete comprehension of new material.

### **Implementing Theatre Arts in Instruction: An Example**

There are a variety of ways to use theatre as a learning strategy. One particular method as applied to social studies instruction will be described next.

#### **Pre-instructional Activity**

A simple way to create a state of readiness to learn is by identifying the focus of learning through a question posted on the board or overhead (e.g., “*What was a reason Europeans set sail on voyages of discovery?*”). Next, form students into groups of 3 or 4. Then have them prepare a “*still photograph*” that represents a possible response to the initial question. For the example provided, students might depict an incident of bartering or religious persecution. Whether or not students come up with the correct answer is unimportant. During the pre-instructional phase the goal of the educator is to assess students’ prior knowledge about the new concept to be introduced (e.g., voyages of discovery during the 1400s) and to involve students in their learning. Because students are grouped together for this photograph, they will naturally incorporate peers’ ideas. Because invent-

ing dialogue is not a requirement, students with learning disabilities who have expressive language deficits will not be at a disadvantage. Furthermore, putting that student in a group with more able peers will ensure a successful presentation.

*Structuring the pre-instructional activity.* The first time this strategy is used, the teacher should model it for the class as a whole. For younger students, showing them a photograph of people and discussing poses may be helpful. As the groups go off to different corners of the room to plan their photograph, the teacher will need to monitor students’ collaborative process. The teacher need not give groups correct solutions at this point, but merely make sure groups understand what they are to do and that all group members need to be involved. Productive collaboration can be facilitated informally. For instance, the teacher might prompt students to be sure all students know what their pose will look like. A more formal approach to ensuring collaboration might be to distribute group-monitoring sheets. This method involves handing a designated group member a list of particular skills or behaviors the teacher wants to see from every member (e.g., offers a suggestion, encourages other members, cooperates with members). The student designee would then be responsible for recording instances of each skill or behavior for each member in the group. This task could be rotated so that over time every student has the opportunity to observe these behaviors in their peers.

Presenting groups with a time limit is often helpful. Ten minutes planning time is more than sufficient for groups to come up with a potential solution to the initial question and to create a photograph. Giving students a 2-minute advanced warning signal is also recommended.

*Preparing the audience.* When groups are ready, the

**Table 1**

### **Questions to Facilitate Higher Order Thinking Based on Bloom’s Taxonomy**

#### **Knowledge**

What do you notice about this enactment? What’s going on? Is this situation portrayed accurately? How can you tell? How are the players showing their character’s feelings?

#### **Comprehension**

How do you know this enactment is accurate? Is anything missing in this enactment? What title would you give this enactment?

#### **Application**

Can you relate this enactment to something going on today? How can we apply this enactment to a current situation?

#### **Analysis**

From whose perspective is this enactment understood? What are the characters’ motives according to this enactment? How is the background or the history of the person influencing the enactment?

#### **Synthesis**

What if we changed some feature about this enactment? Would another person view this situation the same way? Why or why not? What if this person never existed or this event had never happened? What might happen after this enactment?

#### **Evaluation**

Why does the situation portrayed in the enactment matter to us? What one thing would you change about this person/event if you could and why? Do you agree with how the characters/persons behaved? Why or why not? What action could the person/character take that would most change the outcome?

teacher will need to review appropriate audience behavior, which is (a) to listen quietly until called upon to contribute, and (b) to focus on how each group solved the problem (e.g., notice what reason the group came up with for Europeans setting sail on voyages of discovery). Group members should be asked not to present until they have the attention of all audience members.

As each group demonstrates their photograph, the teacher plays a crucial role by questioning the audience while group members remain posed. The best questions always proceed from what is most concrete (e.g., *What do you see here? What are the people doing? From their posture and facial expression, how do they feel?*) to questions which are more abstract (e.g., *What does each person seem to want? What would this person say if he/she could speak? Give this photo a title*). The teacher may want to use Bloom's Taxonomy as a guideline for developing questions

The teacher is always on the lookout for questions that encourage students to make predictions about what they will be learning. For instance, in the present example, students may identify that some form of bartering is taking place. The teacher may facilitate a higher level of understanding by asking students what goods they think the Europeans might be trading, and why these goods might have been desirable. The educator lists group responses on the board or overhead so that the class as a whole can refer to them during the post-instruction stage later on.

Special techniques that can be used at this stage include asking one posed member to say something in character or to move in character for ten seconds. It is recommended that this learning strategy not deteriorate into a guessing game. The educator must structure the questioning phase by posing specific questions to audience members and insisting that students raise their hands to be recognized rather than have students call out guesses about what they think the photograph is showing.

*Setting the purpose for learning.* Finally, the teacher sets the purpose for learning by providing no more than three questions for students to contemplate during the actual instruction phase. In our present example, the teacher would develop a list of three simple questions: (a) What reasons did we generate? (b) What might these reasons tell us about the people of that time? (c) What else do we want to find out? The teacher can add students' responses to the list that was developed earlier.

### **During Instruction**

Once the pre-instructional activity is over, the educator must decide on a way to expose students to the actual content. It is at this stage that students may read the information from the textbook, preferably with accommodations for students with reading disabilities (e.g., paired reading, audiotapes). However, students may also interact with the content

via filmstrips, videotape, a story told by the teacher or a computer-generated activity. That is, theatre games are not used to replace new content, but to enable students to bring their own experience to bear on content (pre-instructional activity), provide them with a reason for wanting to learn more (instructional activity) and to revise their misconceptions (post-instructional activity).

Some teachers might want to expose students to new concepts by taking on a role themselves. For instance, Dorothy Heathcoate has developed a technique in which the teacher role-plays with the students and in this way is able to teach new material (Johnson & O'Neill, 1989). In this method the teacher may assign students in the class to several different roles. Some might be crew members on sailing ships of the time, others a small group of merchants back home, while the remaining students might be Europeans who were looking for a place to live free of religious persecution. The teacher using this technique explains important details while in character. In this particular instance, the educator might play King Ferdinand of Spain and try to talk the merchants into subsidizing voyages of discovery, telling them that the subjects would pay high prices for a spice called salt that makes spoiled food taste better. The teacher using this technique will need to figure out a way to involve different students-in-role by asking them questions to elicit their involvement (e.g., *"You know we have no way to freeze our food here in the summer, don't you? How does our food taste when it spoils? What could we use to make it taste better? Salt? Yes, I heard of an explorer who discovered this spice in the far away lands of the East Indies. Can you find that place on a map for me?"*). For further information on the teacher-in-role technique, see Johnson and O'Neill (1989).

Another method of supporting students with reading disabilities in the instruction phase is to form cooperative learning groups to read the textbook. Vaughn, Klinger and Schumm (1996) developed a structured cooperative learning method called Collaborative Strategic Reading to help students comprehend their reading material.

### **Post-instructional Activity**

For our present example, after instruction students would be asked to "revisit" their initial photograph. This time, though, the teacher would ask students to modify their photograph based on what they had learned. It is not necessary that all photographs be revisited. The educator should select only one or two photographs that lend themselves easily to alteration in a way that focuses on the teacher's learning goals.

The teacher may facilitate this process for less-able students by having groups re-enact their initial photograph, but allow the audience to assist verbally with the revisions. For instance, audience members may suggest ways for players to repose themselves or to change facial expressions, or they

may suggest persons or objects that are missing from the initial enactment. Sample questions may include, "Describe the place in which these historical persons find themselves." "What is each person's station in life?" "Why is the good being bartered here so important?"

An alternative way to structure the revisited photograph is to ask the selected group members to re-enact their original poses. (The teacher will want to keep brief written or videotaped notes of original poses in the event that students cannot recall them.) Next, the teacher could elicit class reflection by having all students write down what was wrong or missing from the original photograph and how the photograph might be altered or improved to be historically accurate. In this way, the educator has assessment information to document student learning. After collecting students' written responses, the teacher can proceed with the physical re-enactment and audience suggestions for improvement of the original photograph.

### Conclusion

This article offers a rationale for using theatre as a learning strategy in the content areas for students with reading-learning disabilities. Students with reading-learning disabilities have problems with metacognition that impede learning exclusively from the textbook. In contrast, research has documented that key elements associated with dramatic enactment (i.e., multi-sensory input, inducement of positive affective states, active engagement, imagery-based learning, and activation of prior knowledge) directly address most of these metacognitive deficits. Furthermore, reading comprehension can be improved when dramatic enactments are integrated with textbook reading. Therefore, theatrical pre-instructional and post-instructional activities have been recommended as an alternative to more traditional learning strategies. Although theatre-based activities may not be the answer for all students, there is ample reason to give this instructional strategy a chance in content area instruction. An application of the theatre-based approach was explained in hopes that educators might find this method useful and easy to implement.

For educators wishing to learn more about how to integrate theatre into instruction, the following resources will be helpful:

- Theater Games for the Classroom* (Spolin, 1986)
- Dorothy Heathcote: Collected writings on education and drama* (Johnson & O'Neill, 1989)
- The Power of the Arts* (Smith, 2001)
- Wings to Fly* (Bailey, 1993)
- Chicago Arts Partnership in Education* (Catterall & Waldorf, 1999)

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