





3-D LITERACY

FOR TEACHERS



RICHARD GRUNN



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Print ISBN: 978-1-54394-821-9

eBook ISBN: 978-1-54394-822-6

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Thank you to Sundog Theatre in Staten Island, NY, which was instrumental in developing, funding, and testing this program from its inception. Special thanks to The Staten Island Foundation for its dedicated support to the program. Program funders include NYC Department of Cultural Affairs and the NY City Council, Bay & Paul Foundations, Mary Duke Biddle Foundation, Con Edison, IECA, Senator Andrew Lanza, Nora Roberts Foundation, Northfield Bank Foundation, and Braitmayer Foundation. Also Sundog’s staff who edited and mired through numerous versions of this book: Susan Fenley, Marjorie Hack, and Brooke Haramija. Thank you to Jennifer Gormley, and staff from P.S. 31 for their support for the program and to P.S. 44 for piloting the original residency.

Staten Island Foundation with students and staff from P.S. 44

Photos by Patti Boustany, Margaret Grace, and Susan Fenley.

Cover Photo: Students at P.S. 36 performing “Punctuation People.”

Inside Photo: Students at P.S. 65 performing “Punctuation People.”

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ABOUT 3-D LITERACY

The 3-D Literacy Program runs 12 to 15 weeks and meets twice a week. The program is designed for flexibility to meet a class's level and needs. Emphasis is on the process, not the final production. Your final show represents the work each class creates during the program and then presents as a collection of pieces rather than a full production.

What it does:

- Incorporates core curricula, multiple intelligences, and brain-based learning theories
- Explores literacy, phonology, and spelling patterns
- Uses innovative word meaning and grammar exercises
- Offers exercises and concepts to help students understand, write, interpret, create, and communicate language skills
- Brings words from the page into a third dimensional interpretation

Some of the results:

- Increases reading scores by 1-11 levels
- Supports social and emotional learning
- Helps students succeed with challenging subjects
- Opens doors for literature appreciation
- Helps students accept diverse personalities and ideas
- Increases vocabulary

In the 1980s, two psychologists, Betty Hart and Todd R. Risley, researched the number of words spoken by young children from different socioeconomic backgrounds. They found a large disparity not only in the complexity of words used, but also differences in the numbers. The children of professionals were exposed to about 1,500 more words hourly than children growing up in poverty. The gap is more than 32 million words by the age of 4. This is known as ‘word deficit’ and is one of the influences for the 3-D Lit program. The lessons integrate vocabulary words from the curriculum. They are designed to create a multitude of scenarios or situations in which the vocabulary words can be used to help inspire stronger understanding and meaning.

The program also explores grammar through personification. In one of the lessons, students play punctuation marks. Through the experience of gesture and physical expression, they gain a better understanding of where a punctuation mark is used and its traits.

The 3-D Literacy process centers on slowly building confidence and awareness through the craft of acting. Students start by learning pantomime (non-verbal), then status (power of a character), and finally improvisation (acting without a script).

This ebook has video links to specific lessons and games.

Link: <https://vimeo.com/3dliteracy>

Theatre as a Teaching Tool

There are strong parallels between teaching and acting; teachers need to be great storytellers so they can connect to their students. They also need to know how students are responding to what they are teaching. Actors need to do the same; but their connection is with an audience. I believe theatre is one of the greatest teaching tools.

A multitude of academic subjects can be taught through theatre. Here are some:

Math: When I was a scenic carpenter at a scene shop in Seattle, Washington, I had to build sets and used math for measuring and figuring how things go together. One day, I was struggling with building a platform for one of the sets. The master carpenter took me aside and showed me how to use the Pythagorean Theory to find two parallel lines in space. I was thrilled that I actually used it to create something. It had a purpose. Most of my experiences with the theory were on a chalkboard in 10th grade. Math is essential to set and building design and construction. (Not to mention costume and lighting.)

Science: A lighting designer must know the physics and physiology of color: how color mixes through light and on actors, costumes, and sets. S/he needs to know all about voltage, wattage and electricity, field angles, and the characteristics of each specific lighting instrument.

History: History of the playwrights reflects what happened in their lives and that leads to the actual play that was written about a moment in history. A top-shelf example is many of the plays by that English playwright with the pointed mustache and ruffled shirt, who is most affectionately known as, ‘The Bard’ (William Shakespeare).

English Language Arts (ELA): Actors, playwrights, and directors read, write, and discuss plays all the time. It’s part of the job.

Other valuable areas: public speaking, problem solving, and critical thinking. These skills are crucial in and out of school as well as for students’ future careers.

Teachers are similar to actors. They have a lesson (script) that they teach (perform) to their students (audience). Again, a good teacher is a good storyteller.



Students at P.S. 58 participating in the Boxed Word lesson

THE BRAIN AND LEARNING THEORIES

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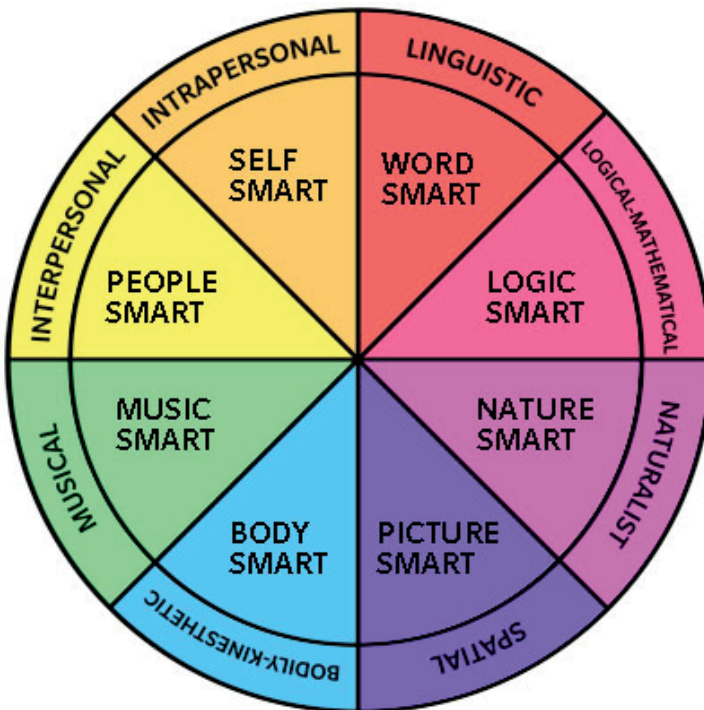
Program creator Richard Grunn explaining how the brain learns

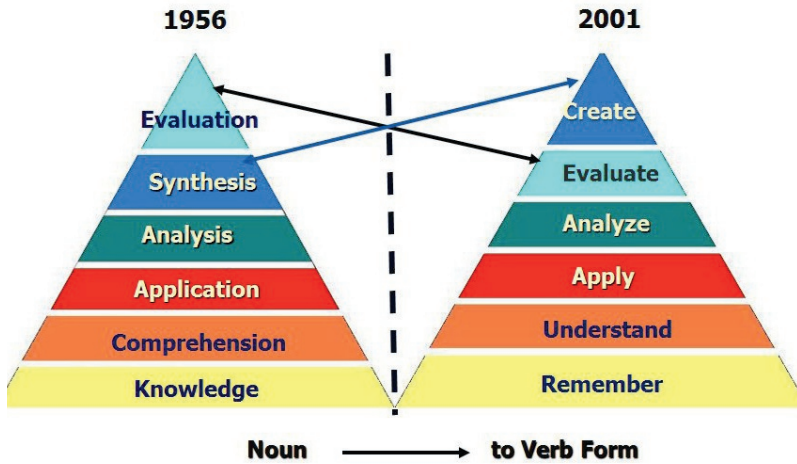
Learning Theories

There are two learning theories incorporated into 3-D Literacy:

Gardner's Multiple Intelligences: These were formulated by Howard Gardner, a professor of education at Harvard University, in 1999. His theory suggests that the traditional idea of intelligence, based on I.Q. testing, is too limited. Equal attention should be given to students who show gifts in other intelligences.

The theory also emphasizes that we as learners process information with a preference for a specific sense or system. Theatre reaches many of the senses because it is a collaborative and multi-discipline art form.





Bloom's Taxonomy:

Bloom's Taxonomy was designed in 1956 by Dr. Benjamin Bloom, an educational psychologist, to promote higher levels of thinking in education rather than just rote learning.

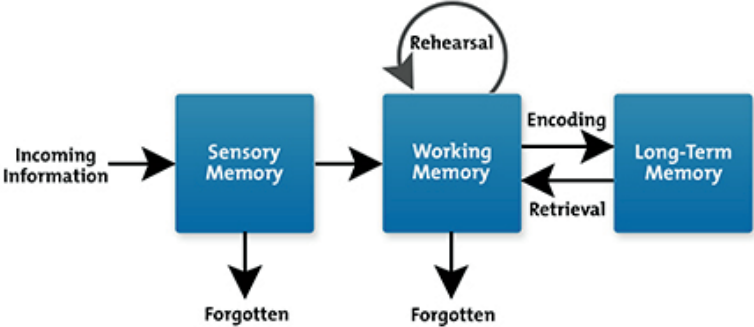
In 2001, Bloom's pyramid levels were converted from nouns to verbs, and the highest level of learning is 'create.' Through the creation of something, a physical context is formed, which is very important to long-term memory. The arts give a learner something to create.

The Brain and Memory

3-D Literacy relates directly to brain-based learning theories: specifically the process of how the brain remembers. In that process, the brain takes in information from all the senses – sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste – then processes them to see if they are worth moving through the different stages of memory. The first stage is immediate memory – what is coming in at the moment. The brain then sends information to working memory to decide if the information is worth storing in long-term memory. For that to happen information needs to have sense, meaning, and an emotional connection to

the newly learned information. When it does, the information has a better chance of being stored in long-term memory.

The arts help create positive emotional connections and multiple associations to information and learning, helping establish long-term memories which aid in classroom learning. An example of the process: A student is trying to memorize vocabulary words. One of the words is 'ancient.' The student remembers the word meaning something very old and in social studies the class studied the ancient civilization of the Mayans (sense and meaning). The class goes to the museum and sees ancient artifacts of civilizations (associations). Then perhaps the student makes a Mayan mask in art class and creates a play and/or a Mayan dance (emotional connection).



Researchers believe that the more personally meaningful the association of encoded information, the more effective the encoding.

According to Dr. Hannah Bayer, Research Associate Professor of Decision Sciences at New York University (2016), “There is a network of brain areas that contribute to reading and ... development of each of those areas – grammar, meaning, visual and hearing areas – and the connections between them are critical for successful reading skills. It is likely that training programs that tap into as many of these areas as possible, and stress the integration of these skills, will be the most successful at strengthening this network.”

Theatre – and the arts – help create sense, meaning, and emotional connections to what children study. It also creates multiple associations that strengthen the connection to what is learned. When we use theatre and the arts in the classroom, the learning connections are more likely to be stored in long-term memory, helping students retain the information by presenting and communicating through spoken word and action.

Dr. Michael Posner states, “We know that the brain has a system of neural pathways dedicated to attention. We know that training these attention networks improves general measures of intelligence. And we can be fairly sure that focusing our attention on learning and performing an art—if we practice frequently and are truly engaged—activates these same attention networks. We therefore would expect focused training in the arts to improve cognition generally. Some may construe this argument as a bold associative leap, but it’s grounded in solid science.”



ACTING BASICS



Students at P.S. 58 performing "The Glove"

How to be an Audience Member

During the height of the Elizabethan theatre, it is estimated that two out of 15 Londoners attended the theatre weekly. That is only 13% of the population. Today, the percentage of people going to the theatre weekly is less than 1%.

In contrast, today's attendance at the movies is much higher than live theatre. Television viewing is at an all-time high. According to

the most recent Nielsen Report, the average American watches five hours a day.

There is a good chance most students in the program have not been, for lack of a better word, “trained” to be good participants in an audience. They have not attended a professional theatre and have no idea what is required and, therefore, don’t know how to conduct themselves.

It is essential that children understand audience etiquette; this is not only important when they attend the theatre, but when they attend any function and especially when they are working and creating for each other in the classroom.

There are times when students come to class with rambunctious energy. To get them settled and focused, I give them what is called “**Audience Training.**” They sit quietly for two minutes looking at the stage. That is all. Any whispering or disruption and the clock is reset. I don’t hold this over their heads as a punishment; it is something that they must do to get focused, centered, and be ready to work. Audience etiquette also builds personal courtesy toward others. Courtesy given will result in courtesy received.

I like to keep it simple and post this sign in the classroom:

The Actors Can Hear You!

Listen with your ears.

Watch with your eyes.

Stay in your seat.

Don’t talk.

Don’t whisper.

Laugh when something is funny.

Acting takes great concentration. I tell my students it takes as much concentration as taking an exam.

The Warm Up

For each class, a warm up is given to help students focus, release stress, and get centered. They stand in a circle starting in a neutral position, weight on both feet, with arms hanging loose and knees not locked.

Slow Vertebrae Rolls: In neutral position, students hold an imaginary string, which is suspending their heads like that of a marionette. They allow the imaginary string to slowly release and have their bodies bend down one vertebra at a time. When they bend over, they take a deep breath, shake their arms, and slowly return to the neutral position.

Neck Rolls/Shoulder Rolls: Roll the neck around slowly clockwise and then counter clockwise. Do the same with the shoulders.

Stretching: Feet on the floor, stretch with arms over head.

Breathing: With eyes closed, students take three deep, long breaths while holding their hands on their diaphragm/stomach.

Tongue Twisters: People are always intrigued and sometimes alarmed by some of the exercises actors do; sometimes they run around like animals, or shout at the wind, or just lie on the floor releasing an audible exhale. Depending on their ages, children can look at these exercises as bizarre or great fun. However, it is always good to explain why actors do these exercises. Tongue twisters help with centering and focus while loosening up the mouth and vocal articulators (tongue, lips, jaw). They help with enunciation and prevent stumbling over words.

There are many tongue twister variations. Here are some simple ones:

**Specific Pacific...Aluminum Linoleum...Red Leather Yellow
Leather...Unique New York**

Loosening the muscles of the mouth and face helps before doing twisters: stretching face and mouth, opening and scrunching.

Students can use their fingers to massage their faces and loosen their jaws.

Face Shake: Relax the jaw and make sure the tongue is not in between the teeth. Clasp the hands, hold the arms out in front and shake the face while making an 'Ahh' sound.

Using Warm-Ups in the Classroom

Warm ups are a great way to get blood and oxygen circulating through the body. Students do hours of sitting during a school day and these exercises can help keep them from getting stiff and tired.

Breathing is another oxygenator for the brain. Deep cleansing breaths are excellent for blood flow, and helpful to do before a test.

Tell students to stand and close their eyes. Make sure there is no talking or extra sounds. Have them take a slow deep inhale and then exhale. Wait a few seconds, then take another one. Wait a few seconds and take a third one. This relaxes and focuses them.

Meditation or mindfulness is another great tool to use with students before a test, after recess, or just to help with focus. Have them sit in their seats and guide them through a short meditation.

Actors use various mindfulness techniques to help with breathing, awareness, and releasing chatter of the mind.

A simple listening meditation:

1. Turn the lights out. No talking.
2. Have students sit up in their chairs with eyes closed.
3. Have them take three deep cleansing breaths.
4. Tell them to listen to their own breathing.
5. Guide them through the awareness of other sounds in the room: ventilation system, sound of a clock.

6. Guide them to the awareness of sounds outside the room: other classrooms, cars going by, other students talking.
7. Do this for 10-15 minutes. Ask them what they heard.

You can do the same with classical music-allowing students to listen to specific instruments, then all of them. They then can create a story in their minds as they listen to the music



Students at P.S. 44 exploring an improv game

Theatre Games

Theatre Games are essential building blocks for teaching acting. The games I use have been borrowed, circulated, and reconstructed over the years. To find more, look in Viola Spolin's book, "Improvisation for the Theater". She is the 'Grande Dame' of this art form and has compiled a comprehensive handbook of improvisational games for actors and students. The program has specific games that segue from the warm up and are done for every class. Most games bring several benefits to the actor/student: focus, group synergy, energy, and awareness, to name a few. These same games can be used to help brain stimulation for students in the classroom. Taking a few minutes for these exercises pays off in student focus and engagement. It also builds class camaraderie, especially at the beginning of the year.

Zim Zam Zoom: Students form a circle. The leader/instructor takes out an imaginary ball of energy. The ball of energy needs to move around the circle. One student starts by saying "Zim" and pointing to the person that will get the energy next. That student receives the energy and says "Zam" pointing to another student. That student receives the energy and says "Zoom" pointing to another student. The sequence starts over from the beginning. Zim-Zam-Zoom. Students must only say "Zim, Zam, Zoom." (This exercise is great for sequential thinking, energy and working together: ensemble.) Play with the speed and rhythm of Zim Zam Zoom. In time, students realize they control the tempo of the game by working together. Change the language to 1-2-3. Then no language. They will send it around without words while making eye contact. At the end, take the energy and put it back in the bag/pocket.

Goal: Students need to send the energy around quickly while making eye contact. Focus and energy typically improves over a short time.

Link: [Zim Zam Zoom](#)

Transformation: Students form a circle. Instructor drops a bed sheet in the middle. One at a time, students transform the sheet into an object. Examples would be: a ball, necktie, dress, hat. The goal is for the student transforming the sheet to believe that what they create is real. Specific locations can be added: something at the beach, in the forest, at the mall. This helps students expand the creative abilities of their imagination: a sheet becomes a guitar, a flying carpet, or a beard.

Goal: The pace should move quickly. Students should not guess what is being transformed. It is important students support each other and not talk.

Link: [Transformation](#)

Walking and Freeze: Have students walk around the room slowly, moving their arms and legs in a circular motion, then have them freeze to create interesting shapes. *Language:* Walking.... One, Two, Three, Freeze.

Goal: Students should create interesting shapes with their bodies. When they freeze they don't move and listen for the cue to move again.

Tableaux from Paintings/Historical Events: Have children recreate classic paintings or historic events by mimicking historical characters or figures. Other students will be the camera. They close their eyes while other students get into position to duplicate the painting.

Language: Camera closed. (Students who are the camera close their eyes.) Positions. (Students who will be in the painting get into position.) One, Two, Three, Freeze. (Students in the tableaux "freeze.") Camera open. (Students who are the cameras open eyes.) Camera closed. (Then do the next painting or historic event.)

Goal: Students will need help creating the historic tableaux. This is a great way to integrate history and social studies curricula and then have them discuss what they see in the tableaux.

Ring on a String: Sitting on the floor, students form a circle holding a string that is tied at the end. A large ring is placed on the string and students move the ring by working together. One raises the string, the other lowers it. One hand must be on the string at all times and the ring cannot touch the hand while it moves around. Students then have to send the ring around with their eyes closed. (It can touch their hand this time.) They need to see the ring in their mind's eye as it travels around. Then two rings are placed on the string. Variations can be played where rings travel together or away from each other.

Goal: Students' group focus is important. They must work together and help each other.

Cab Ride: Set up six chairs together, two in a row, like the seats in a car. One student is the driver. The other students stand in a line. The first rider in line puts out a hand. The driver pulls over. The rider gets in the car and initiates a sound and/or movement. (e.g., turning the head to one side and saying, "Hey." The driver must copy the passenger's movement while they have a conversation about where the passenger needs a ride and continue the movement until the next rider is picked up. When the next rider enters the car, everyone must copy that movement/sound. It continues until all are in the car.

Goal: It is important to keep the conversation going as each rider enters. A good game for listening to each other and staying focused while talking.

Follow the Leader or Detective: Students stand in a circle. One student leaves the room. S/he is the detective. Instructor picks a student to be the leader. The leader makes small movements that everyone in the circle must follow (e.g., swinging arms, tapping the head). The student that left the room – the detective – returns

and stands in the center of the circle. The detective guesses who the leader is by observing where the movement originates. The leader has to change the movements. When the detective guesses who the leader is, the detective then becomes the leader and another detective is chosen.

Goal: The group has to work together and is not allowed to talk. They should not be looking at the leader but at the person across from them. The leader has to time the changes so the detective doesn't see them. Also, the leader should not make any sounds.

Link: [Follow the Leader](#)

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