

Count Me In

teacher-in-role

strategies for

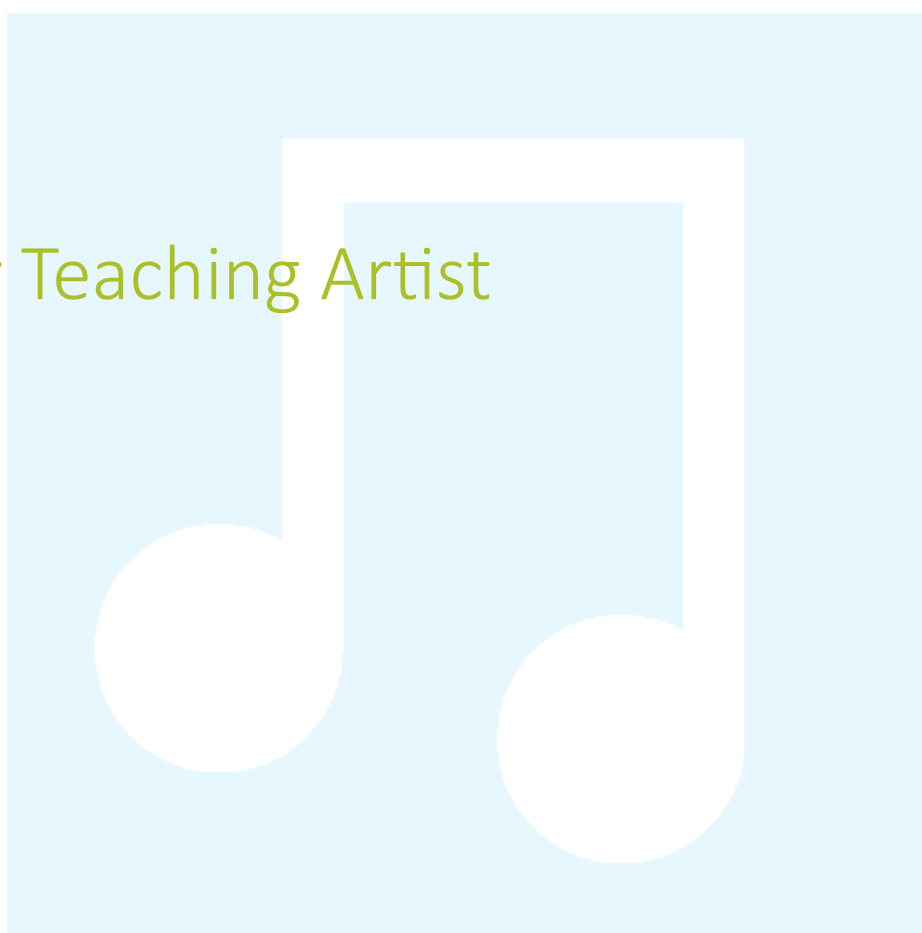
STEM exploration

presented by

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U.S. Department of Education
Arts in Education Model Development and Dissemination Grant Program
Suzanne S. and Glenn A. Youngkin

Endowment Support

The Howard and Sondra Bender Family Fund for Education
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Introduction

“All young children are naturally curious about their environment and the world around them and learn best when allowed to actively explore using their senses. These experiences provide the foundation for abstract and scientific thought...”

Children use pretend play to explore and manipulate materials, creative arts to express their ideas, and literacy and language arts to research answers to questions.”
(PAELS p. 31 – Scientific Thinking and Technology)

Young children inherently explore their world through dramatic play. As children act out a story, they become intellectually absorbed in the process of identifying problems and taking the initiative to solve them in creative ways. Through imaginative role-playing, children naturally experiment, investigate, discover and invent. In other words, they think like scientists!

In the “Count Me In!” workshop, teachers learn how to place themselves within the world of children’s dramatic play to heighten and enrich experiential learning related to Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM.) By assuming a character within a story or scenario, teachers invite the children to actively engage in creative problem-solving and experimentation over an extended period of time. Teachers in-role can empower children to become the experts in the story who take responsibility for accomplishments and develop crucial critical thinking skills.

Specific teacher in-role strategies addressed in this workshop include using signaling tools to transition in and out of character, formulating effective open-ended questions for profound STEM explorations and adapting informational texts, nursery rhymes or classroom materials for extended dramatic play scenarios. Teachers participate in a STEM exploration inspired by informational texts, then create a teacher in-role lesson plan of their own.

Welcome Experience: “Bazooka Bubble Gum”

Objective: to use music/chant as a transitional tool and focusing experience

Early Childhood Developmental Domains addressed: Auditory/visual attention, Listening, Following directions, Steady beat, Rhyming, Gross/fine motor, Patterns, Counting, Sequencing, Data Analysis, Comparisons

Begin this upbeat call and response song by establishing a steady beat through clapping, tapping and other creative movements. Vary your volume, pitch, emotion – but keep the beat steady!

My mom gave me a penny (echo)
To buy a henny (echo)
I didn't buy a henny (echo)
I bought some bubble gum (echo)
Bazooka-zooka bubble gum (echo)

My mom gave me a dime (echo)
To buy a lime (echo) ...

My mom gave me a quarter (echo)
To buy some water (echo) ...

My mom gave me a nickel (echo)
To buy a pickle (echo)
I didn't buy a pickle (echo)
I bought some bubble gum (echo)
Bazooka-zooka bubble gum (echo)

My mom gave me a dollar (echo)
To buy a collar (echo) ...

My mom gave me ten bucks (echo)
To buy some trucks (echo) ...

Add extra interest to the song by assuming other characters in this story. How might “the mom” sing this song? What about the “store keeper” or the “little brother?” This simple story-song can lead to an extended exploration in the classroom!

Graphing and Data Analysis Extension

Create a graph to show how many pieces of gum can be purchased for each coin. Pretend to be the storekeeper as the children pretend to purchase bubble gum. Refer to the graph and ask questions such as “How many pieces of gum can I buy for a nickel?” or “Can you buy more gum with a penny or a dime?”

Measurements and Comparisons Extension

Pretend to be the child in the song who is sharing gum with his/her friends. Make predictions together: “How big will your bubble be if you chew one piece of gum? Five pieces? Twenty-five pieces?” Pretend to blow the different size bubbles and use your hands and bodies to show the different sizes.

Did you know? ... Music develops math skills!

Basic musical elements such as beat, rhythm and patterns stimulate mathematical growth in areas such as spatial reasoning, sequencing, counting, patterning and one-to-one correspondence. When children engage in steady beat activities such as marching or clapping, they are making one-to-one correspondence. When you sing a song faster, slower, louder or quieter, they are making comparisons. When they repeat a phrase or melody, they are identifying patterns.

Teacher-in-Role FAQ's

What is Teacher-in-Role?

“Teacher-in-Role” is a drama strategy in which the teacher assumes a role in a story or scenario, then relates to the children as this character.

Why use Teacher-in-Role?

It's fun! This strategy invites children to become fully immersed in a dramatic play scenario. If the teacher is also part of the imaginary experience, children find it easier to assume their own roles and are empowered to take ownership of the story.

This strategy increases children's emotional connection to an experience and motivates them to explore a concept over a long period of time. A child may show minimal attention to stacking blocks, but if he believes he is helping Jack build a ladder to climb his beanstalk, he may be more excited to finish the task and show greater persistence to make ongoing improvements today, tomorrow and next week.

How do I use Teacher-in-Role to promote STEM learning?

When using the teacher in-role strategy to promote STEM learning, teachers should seek to create imaginative, story-based experiences in which children are:

- **Motivated** by the urgency of a story or imaginary scenario
- Intellectually **absorbed** and **challenged**
- **Engaged** in extended interactions such as investigations, debates, planning and participation
- **Exploring** their own interests, knowledge and understandings through play
- **Taking initiative** in a range of activities and **accepting responsibility** for what is accomplished
- Experiencing the satisfaction of **overcoming obstacles** and solving problems
- Demonstrating **confidence** in their own intellectual powers and questions
- **Helping others** to find out things and to understand them better
- **Applying** their developing basic literacy and numeracy skills in purposeful ways.

Do I have to be a good actor to use the Teacher-in-Role strategy?

Absolutely not! By using a simple costume piece or prop, children will distinguish between your real and pretend identities. However, you can *appear* to be a great actor by making simple adjustments, such as:

- Raising or lowering the pitch of your voice
- Increasing or slowing the speed of your speech
- Adding a recognizable gesture and catch-phrase (i.e. “Howdy!” with a big wave)
- Believing in the emotion or attitude of your character.

Teacher-in-Role FAQ's (cont.)

How do I transition in and out of Teacher-in-Role?

Have a **signaling tool** that tells children when you are transitioning into a new role. It may be as simple as telling the children that when you wear this hat, you will be the bus driver. But you could also ring a bell or count to ten to make the transition. Make it clear if the children will also transition from their roles in the story at this time as well. Be sure to choose costumes that do not hide your face which may be frightening to young children. The goal is not to achieve realism, but simply to represent an idea.

You may wish to assume **multiple roles** in a scenario. Just explain clearly to the children what character each costume or prop represents. (i.e. The Mother wears a scarf. The Cow wears horns. The Giant wears a vest.)

It is okay to **transition in and out of role** during the story. It is valuable to step out-of-role from time to time to reflect with students about their experiences, develop strategies for moving forward or address issues outside of the world of the story such as behavior management.

How do I know which character to “be?”

There are several options for choosing the teacher's role in a story. First of all, think about your teaching goal:

- What problem do you want the children to solve?
- What knowledge of skills do you want them to gain?

Once you have established your teaching goal, think about how the children will interact with your in-role character. Remember, your role serves to provide opportunities for the children to contribute their own ideas – not for you to be center stage!

Think beyond the main character. Sometimes the role that will invite the most interesting involvement from the children is not the obvious main character. Consider minor characters and those that are not in the story, such as store employees, friends, eyewitnesses, reporters, neighborhood gossips or professional experts.

Here are two main “types” to consider:

- 1) **EXPERT** – This character-type possesses special knowledge or skills which are shared with the children. By assuming this role, the teacher can model skills and behavior for the children to emulate. For instance, the teacher plays “Safari Suzie,” an animal expert who describes the traits of an antelope, then invites the children to search for one during a safari.
- 2) **NOVICE** – This character-type does not possess important skills or knowledge. By assuming this role, the children are placed in the role of “experts” who can offer their advice or apply their own skills. For instance, the teacher plays “Safari Sam,” but she has never led a safari before and needs the children to help her correctly identify the animals.

Expert and Novice Characters – We All Went on Safari by Laurie Krebs

Objective: Show how an “expert” and “novice” in-role character may address different learning goals

Early Childhood Developmental Domains addressed: Number and number sense, Measurement, Data Analysis, Algebra, Biology, Rhyming, Steady beat

We All Went On Safari by Laurie Krebs is a rhyming and counting book that includes a wonderful non-fiction section in the back about Tanzanian wildlife and culture.

- 1) **Expert “Safari Suzie”:** Her role is to get the children excited about taking a safari in Africa and provide the background information the children need to enjoy the story. Before the safari begins, she guides the children to make observations of the illustrations in the non-fiction section of the book by asking “what do you see?” “What animals do you recognize or not recognize?” She reveals facts about the animals that the children may not know. Use student observations to create a sound and/or gesture for each animal.
- 2) **Rhythmic Reading:** As expert “Safari Suzie,” take the children on an imaginary safari as you read the book aloud. Keep a steady beat as you read by stomping or clapping. As each animal is named, count them aloud and make its sound/gesture the appropriate number of times.
- 3) **Novice “Safari Sam”:** His goal is to assess what the children have learned about the animals. In this role, the teacher pretends not to know anything about the animals and needs the children’s help to navigate the safari. For instance, “Safari Sam” may confuse the animals and prompt the children to point out the traits that are similar and different.
- 4) **Safari Journey:** As novice “Safari Sam,” lead a journey around the room in which the children take roles as the animals in the story. Chant the words:

*We all went on safari, When the day had just begun
We all went on safari, And it was lots of fun*

As you encounter each new group of animals, add the appropriate number of children to the line. One child plays the leopard, two children play the ostriches, etc. Between verses, count to see how many animals there are all together. “Safari Sam” may need the children to remind him of the appropriate sequence of animals. At the end of the journey, children may use their bodies to visually represent data – such as how many meat-eaters, how many with fur, etc.