



Union Internationale de la Marionnette

# The Power of the Puppet

*Editor*

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The UNIMA  
Puppets in Education,  
Development and Therapy Commission  
Croatian Centre of UNIMA  
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## THE POWER OF THE PUPPET

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# PREFACE

The power of the puppet shows itself in diverse fields: not only in the puppet theatres, not only in rituals and magical spells, but also in the broad range of education and therapy. This has also been recognised by the international puppetry organisation – UNIMA – and the Puppets in Education Commission was founded at the Congress in Budapest in 1996. Its first president was Edi Majaron. Since the Congress in Magdeburg in 2000, the presidency has been headed up by Livija Kroflin. The Commission was expanded at the Congress in Perth and its name was changed to Puppets in Education, Development and Therapy. Its current members are: Meg Amsden (Great Britain), Edmond Debouny (Belgium), Ida Hamre (Denmark), Livija Kroflin (Croatia), Edi Majaron (Slovenia) and Barbara Scheel (Germany).

The aims of the EDT Commission are:

- to stress the importance of the art of puppetry with its unique ability to communicate;
- to encourage creative ways of using puppets from earliest childhood and throughout life;
- to encourage researchers to engage with the field of puppetry in education, development and therapy, and to share their results;
- to encourage the inclusion of puppetry in the training curricula of teachers, therapists and development workers;
- to encourage professional puppeteers to collaborate with educators, therapists, community and development workers and other professionals, to use puppetry in their fields.

One of the ways to achieve those objectives is through the publication of books. In 2002, the Puppets in Education Commission published *The Puppet – What a Miracle!* The book was published in the English language, and then the edition in French followed in 2006. Although there is a translation into Spanish, it has not been published as yet.

Almost all the members of the EDT Commission took part in the conference “Promoting the Social Emotional Aspects of Education;

A Multi-faceted Priority” that was held in Ljubljana, Slovenia, in June 2011. The conference was organized by and took place at the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education. It was based on the European Affective Education Network (EAEN), which has an interdisciplinary membership of scholars, researchers and practitioners interested in the “affective” dimension of educational process.

After having successfully acted as ambassadors for puppetry in education and therapy, also promoting the name and ideas of UNIMA, the Commission members decided to prepare a book in which all the papers presented by the Commission members and corresponding members at the Ljubljana Conference would find their place, along with those of other members and corresponding members of the Commission, with other experts in the field being invited to send their contributions.

The result is this book, which contains articles presented at the conference in Ljubljana (some in an expanded form) by the members M. Amsden, I Hamre, L. Kroflin, E. Majaron, B. Scheel; corresponding member Helena Korošec, with articles by Cariad Astles and Matt Smith.

The book covers all three areas: education, development (written by three authors from Great Britain, who use that very appropriate term *applied puppetry*) and therapy.

**Edi Majaron** writes about the important part that puppets play in various aspects of a child’s development. He expresses his belief in the magical power of the puppet in all kinds of communication with children, which enlightens their talents and different forms of their creativity.

**Ida Hamre’s** article “Affective Education through the Art of Animation Theatre” was based on her PhD dissertation “Animation Theatre as an Art and as an Element of Aesthetic Development and Education” and the project aimed to provide fundamental and elementary introductions to animation theatre in schools, at colleges for teachers, and for educators. In this article she focuses on a “knowledge of confiding”, emotional learning and working together, humour and “utopian imagination”.

**Helena Korošec** stresses the need to make puppets a part of everyday work in education. According to her, symbolic play with puppets

complements frontal, one-way communication in the classroom, creates an atmosphere of relaxation, enables an individualistic approach, non-verbal communication and fosters creativity.

**Livija Kroflin** writes about her experience in teaching a second or foreign language – particularly Croatian as a second or foreign language – under the specific conditions of a brief workshop for children of various ages, with differing pre-knowledge of the language and diverse motivations. In these circumstances the puppet has shown its importance in the role of motivator, eliminator of inhibitions and an integrating element for a group of children who barely know each other.

**Cariad Astles** contributes an article which is an overview of puppetry for development internationally. She explains the terms Theatre for Development and Puppetry for Development, and examines three separate case studies of Puppetry for Development: activities of the Community Health Awareness Puppeteers (Kenya), Gary Friedman (South Africa) and Small World Theatre (UK).

**Matt Smith** asks himself two questions: Where do we find the politics in the practice of applied puppetry? How can puppetry be engaged as a tool in applied theatre practice? His article concerns the ideological uses and political purposes of puppetry in education and community contexts.

**Meg Amsden** presents an example from practice. In her article subtitled “Teaching Sustainability Through Shadow Puppetry – A Practical Example of a Project to Encourage 7 –11 Year-olds to Design for Their Future” she describes the Being Carbon Neutral project, that she and her colleague Nicky Rowbottom conducted in schools in the Broads National Park in 2009. The objective of the project was to encourage children to think dynamically and positively about living sustainably in a future dominated by climate change.

**Barbara Scheel** describes her worldwide experience in puppet therapy, and puppetry in schools and institutions for disabled people. She expresses her belief that puppetry is one of the most self-differentiating tools for communication and expression of emotions and is a wonderful tool for therapy, education and special needs.

Although the authors represented here share similar ideas, the stances the authors express in the individual articles are, of course, their own and not necessarily those of the whole group of contributors and/or of the EDT Commission.

We believe that this book will be a welcome contribution to the ever-widening understanding of the power of the puppet in various fields of life.

*Livija Kroflin*  
President of the EDT Commission

## ART AS A PATHWAY TO THE CHILD

*Art plays an important part in various aspects of a child's development. The puppet especially provides the child with a kind of cover or disguise to hide behind: a timid child finds the courage to speak, to express his/her own emotions and to open his/her secrets to the puppet and through it to the audience. In this manner the puppet helps the child to communicate much more spontaneously, avoiding stressful relationships, especially with adults. The puppet is an authority selected by the child himself.*

*Contemporary attempts to use narration as a method of rediscovering and stabilising the child's personality are supported by using puppets. Besides the fact that a child is not able to express all his feelings verbally, puppet heroes help him find words and another point of view or perspective. In addition, children accustomed to using puppets in their everyday conversations have a richer vocabulary. They are able to understand the semiotic-symbolic value of visual signs and the language of non-verbal communication, which is important in identifying their real abilities and progress in important areas of development – cognition, sensation, movement and co-ordination, social skills... and last but not least, language expression.*

*Through his experience in working with puppets, the author believes in the magical power of the puppet in all kinds of communication with children, enlightening their talents and different forms of their creativity.*

**Key words:** child, art, communication through and by art, symbolic play, puppet

Art is an important part of culture that most distinctly separates a human being from all other living creatures. It derives from ancient rituals, presenting human communication with gods as a sign of respect and dependence on their will. Rituals were always expressed





by stylised visual appearance (by costume, mask...), symbolic movements and specific sounds. These are the roots of all the arts. Over thousands of years mankind has accumulated a precious heritage, enriched from generation to generation with new art-works contributed by the most brilliant

artists. This heritage fills our lives with positive energy, confronts us with ourselves and provokes us to be conscious and proud human beings.

It is therefore of the utmost importance for every child to get a chance as soon as possible to be confronted with the many faces of art: everything that surrounds him/her belongs to visual culture; the environment is therefore so important for the child's development. Music calms children or encourages them to move, to dance. Children's games with toys are their first interaction with the environment, becoming soon a symbolic play of roles, closely related to their experience and knowledge about the world that surrounds them. This world is enormous, so children use puppets (as the smallest art form) – most appropriate to their size – to solve their problems in a parabolic way. When they invite their parents or peers as an audience, theatre is born.

What is theatre? Where did it come from? Why?

It is a symbolic form of communication and transmission of messages; therefore it's not as stressful as everyday direct interaction. Deriving from rituals it is stylised on 3 levels (as emphasised before): visually, in movement and in sound – that means: very expressive and clear in nonverbal communication. This is the primary reason to use it also in the educational process, since nonverbal language is understandable also to very young children.



What is the difference between “actor’s theatre” and puppet theatre?

An actor’s play expresses personal EGO, while on the other hand play with a puppet needs transmission of attention/energy from the puppeteer to his “object (puppet)”, resulting in an indirect communication, and avoiding direct personal “eye to eye” stressful contact. Transmission of personality to an object



is something special: the belief in miraculous transformation can be compared to the child’s relationship to his/her toys. In the child’s fantasy, each object has its own life and soul. Objects and toys take over the function of an imaginative world in which the child dictates the rules and searches for possible solutions to his unsolved problems. According to Vigotsky, this kind of game improves the child’s development at all stages. Surprisingly, puppetry integrates nearly all disciplines important for this



development: perception, comprehension, movement, co-ordination, interaction with the environment, speech, narration. It is difficult to explain the fact that puppets usually make better contact with the child than pre-school teachers or even parents. It seems that it is the already mentioned

three-levelled stylisation which helps the child to feel, to accept and understand a symbolic situation. Through the simplified situation of metaphorically used objects, it is possible to discover the richness of parabolic games, provoking the child’s imagination and creativity as the most important factors in further development.



Creating a puppet is an act, supporting a child's self-esteem.

A new challenge starts with moving the new-born puppet. But it is not enough only to move it! Younger children will discover the miracle of animation spontaneously: by watching their puppet, e.g. transferring the focus of their eyes to their

puppet, as in their everyday games with toys. The result is fascinating: next to the living puppet, there is no more room for the child's emphasised ego. And vice-versa: shy children will gather more courage to express themselves through puppets, presenting them like some kind of shield. The principles of this *game*, where the child's concentration on the object-toy comes back to the child, transforms into a *play*, where a message is directed at another player and/or audience (Cultural Mediation, Vigotsky).

That is why it is important to establish verbal communication, which is another great aim in the child's development: how to use words, form sentences, invent dialogues – posing different puppets in parabolic conflicts, creating paraphrases of known stories using the same characters, or inventing completely new situations. Here we can see the real power of puppets: visual appearance prompts the invention of a corresponding voice. So the need for narrative expression is supported intensively by other creative actions. A puppet can sing, speak unfamiliar foreign languages, innovate words and expressions for new events. In conversation it can provide the opportunity to hear another, it can recite stories and poems in a literary version, or retell them from the point of view of a person ap-



pearing in the story or poem. The puppet is often curious. It likes to ask questions – usually very provocative ones. It is also prepared to help the child tidy up his things, jump when he is afraid, creep through a tunnel, go to a doctor or brush his teeth. A puppet can speak a dialect or children’s slang, so children can suggest corrections in common language. It can happen that the child is not able to understand all the words of a narration, but will accept the meaning through other elements of the puppet’s non-verbal language. Besides, it is important that the puppet needs few but essential words. It is not a chatterbox, wasting words in



vain. And if a sentence isn’t right, it doesn’t matter! That’s the puppet making errors, not the child. And a shy child is not fighting for his/her own position but for the position of his/her puppet!

A puppet can also personify ideas, mathematical data, days in the week or letters of the alphabet; all this and much more in the hands of an inventive educator, who is able to live with children in their own wonderland, invented together. Thus the child is supported in his imaginative and reproductive creativity, an active child in an active environment.

That means that the use of puppets is not only for very little children but for all ages – depending on their ability and the motivation of the teacher/ educator.

The puppet provides both important poles of the child's needs: a kind of ritual – with daily repetition on one side (i.e. the morning circle...), and surprise in discovering new possible “languages” on the other.



Through these activities the teacher will recognise all the capacities and knowledge of each and every child in the group/class without any stress, through playing theatre (including being the audience, not just the performer), as a result of socialisation.

The use of puppets (including visual expression and music) can result in a considerable contribution to a more humane and less stressful educational system in the first years of a child's integration into a group. Moreover, puppets arouse imagination and creativity. This is one of the simplest and most effective ways to develop and support the child's curiosity about the environment. And when it's filled with the arts – children will accept this same method of communication, to respond through the language of the arts. That is the best dowry for children in their further development.

*All photos are taken from the author's photo archive.*



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## AFFECTIVE EDUCATION THROUGH THE ART OF ANIMATION THEATRE

*The starting point is the Ph. D. dissertation “Animation Theatre as an Art and as an Element of Aesthetic Development and Education”, Copenhagen 1994 by Ida Hamre.*

*This research suggested that animation theatre has many potentialities for learning, but it was not based on practical-pedagogical surveys. Therefore, another project was launched in 1998. Time schedule: 4 years. This last project aimed to provide fundamental and elementary introductions to animation theatre in schools, at colleges for teachers, and for educators. It was called “The Learning Potential and Figurative Language of Animation Theatre – a Survey of Basic Aesthetic Learning Processes, Content Areas and Teacher Qualifications”.*

*In this article the author wants to focus on some aspects of the conclusions – such as:*

### *- A KNOWLEDGE OF CONFIDING*

*The animation process in itself is a knowledge of confiding with a strong appeal to the visual and tactile senses. It demands attention and quietness. This state of mind seems to be a need and, at the same time, it promotes concentration.*

### *- EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND WORKING TOGETHER*

*According to art researcher David Best, the artistic experience is characterized as an emotional and cognitive shock. So we are not dealing with a dichotomy of opposites, but with a complementary relationship. Best uses the term “emotional learning”.*

*The animated figure communicates through a permanent alienation and, in principle, this places performers and spectators on an equal footing, both in terms of the figure and the story. The figure functions as*

*raw material for communication and, as such, becomes an appropriate medium of dialogical pedagogy.*

- HUMOUR

*Humour breaks with habitual thinking and paves the way for positive “breaches of pattern”. Humour is related to the joy of life and it touches upon the basis of all learning.*

*The figures of animation theatre have great power to fascinate. This is true of all types of figures, regardless of their shapes and sizes.*

*The characteristic features of figurative language in the aesthetics of animation theatre and communication contribute to the development of an aspect of imagination, which the writer will call “the utopian imagination”.*

**Key words:** emotional learning through a knowledge of confiding, humour, the art of animation theatre

The starting point for this paper is my Ph. D. dissertation “Animation Theatre as an Art and as an Element of Aesthetic Development and Education”. (Animation Theatre is a wider conception of Puppet Theatre). My starting point is also my later practical-pedagogical project called “The Learning Potential and Figurative Language of Animation Theatre – a Survey of Basic Aesthetic Learning Processes, Content Areas and Teacher Qualifications”.

These projects have shown that animation theatre holds great potential in terms of making way for the pupil’s aesthetic, emotional, and ethical learning and “Bildung” (German concept for the general cultural and social development of the individual). In the following, I focus on some of the potential for this form of theatre.

In my book “Marionet og menneske, animationsteater – billedteater” (“Marionette and Man, Animation Theatre – Visual Theatre”), I have summarised the following typical communicative features, allowing myself to be inspired by other researchers, and furthermore referring to domestic and international performances that I have studied and experienced.



Typical features in the communication of animation theatre:

- Ambiguity and translucency (two-sided appearance).
- Metaphor and transitional phenomena.
- Permanent alienation.
- Synergy.
- Abstraction and stylisation.
- Special theatre conventions.
- Protection of the player's integrity.
- Dialogic work process.
- Pantomimic.
- Humour and utopia.
- Theatre of paradox, live figures, although...
- Cross-aesthetic expression.

In the following I want to focus on some aspects that have a close relationship to affective learning.

Animation theatre has its own clear and complex profile and affords a richness of different crafts, design processes, stories, working methods and subjects. The synergistic dimension is strongly manifested in this theatre art. Many kinds of knowledge and functions work together and constantly change. The different elements work together in fostering innovation, so that the sum of the various expressions, apart from being linked, also creates synergy.<sup>1</sup>

Demands for synergy may be put onto a great variety of art forms; still, synergy is prominent in animation theatre, where it exists latently. The perspective is the development of what I might call "synergistic competence". This potential for learning appears to be in demand, particularly in relation to the multi-media boom in our present culture.

Perhaps, learning through stylised and complex animation theatre can help develop an important synergistic ability to act. The vision could be that the child becomes equipped to transform some of the complex, contradictory and fragmentary impressions of contemporary culture into dynamic forces, as we ourselves do through aesthetic learning processes.

However, that may be: As play, an area for learning with educational content, this theatre form seems to be underestimated today. It could be a cross-aesthetic/cross-professional juncture.

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1 Konstanza Kavrakova-Lorenz: Das Puppenspiel als synergetische Kunstform, 1986.

## “A KNOWLEDGE OF CONFIDING”

The actor acts by using his/her body and voice. When the animation figure “acts” it requires a person, a player/ animator, as it can neither move nor speak on its own. Its movement and language are controlled from the outside. Perhaps the figure is handled by more than one person, perhaps it is mechanical, or both, in alternation. Maybe there is a voice-over from a third person, or a tape recorder. The players can be invisible or hidden, and sometimes they may function as actors or narrators. Thus, the formal language of animation theatre is quite complex. Henryk Jurkowski notes that a characteristic feature in many modern animation theatre shows is change and interchange – a gliding – between the numerous elements and forces involved; a relationship he terms “pulsation”.<sup>2</sup>

On stage, the animated figure seems to be alive, although we realize at the same time that it is inanimate material. The special ability of an animated figure to communicate rests in this ambiguity. Therefore the animation process is extremely important. It is in itself a knowledge of familiarity and “confiding”<sup>3</sup> with a strong appeal to the visual and tactile senses. It demands attention and quietness. This state of mind seems to be a need and, at the same time, it promotes concentration.

Animating is a state of mind, and reaching it presupposes time. Perhaps children and adults need such intense contemplation. Perhaps this is why most people become captivated by it and allow themselves to be drawn into it. For a moment, animation and touch suspend the boundaries of identity – we touch, and are touched, and become part of the world. In this presence something magical and ritual comes about that is shared by players, others artisans and artists.

Animation is pantomimic in itself, with a strong appeal to the visual and tactile senses. Animation demands attention, quietness and concentration on the shape, material and surface of the animation object. The auditory sense is summoned when “an object’s own sounds” are

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2 Henryk Jurkowski and Thomas Seebeek (red.): SEMIOTICA. Vol. 47, p. 144.

3 This often silent knowledge is decidedly a knowledge of “confiding” – a category of knowledge set up by Tore Nordenstams and described by Mogens Nielsen in “Tavs viden og den praktiske dimension i dannelsesprocessen” (Silent Knowledge and the Practical Dimension in the Educational Process), DANSK nr. 1., 1996.

investigated and subsequently used in a short play. In order to allow this familiar knowledge the space to consolidate itself as the basis of an actual show, a plan can be suggested in which object experiments are succeeded by non-verbal training and playing. Later the non-verbal working processes may be combined with simple improvisations with verse, rhymes, and singing, and followed up by improvisations with short lines that have been learnt well enough not to make demands on the memory.

Another form well suited for novices is to have the players perform their show while a narrator, who has memorised the part, narrates. The advantage being that the narrator can let her/his story follow the stage action, while the actors are fully concentrated on the animation, the plot and the interplay.

Whether or not a narrative/story is practiced in a miming or verbal fashion, the dramaturgy is crucial. According to level and context, various dramaturgical models and terms may be presented or detected, after which they can be used as tools for practical work, depending also on training and a sense of timing, tempo, and pulse.

Dramaturgical learning comes into effect both in connection with the development of improvisations, interpretation of existing texts, and analysis of finished performances.

Animation theatre relies strongly on the sense of touch and the tactile experience of the hand, but it also involves the whole body, and therefore its language must be integrated with dramaturgy, drama, and theatre pedagogy in general. Many drama exercises could be combined with animation work and even underpin it.

## **EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND WORKING TOGETHER**

Rituals and games with animated figures are a primeval form of expression, which in recent years has garnered new interest – perhaps, because they challenge a culture of reification characterised by a technology boom and hyper-consumption – and instead represent a material culture that also seeks spiritual and religious dimensions.

In our part of the world, children grow up in a culture epitomised by things and the mass consumption of things. Moreover, the things and idioms of contemporary culture may be characterised as contradictory and fragmented.

Does this situation stimulate the development of an aesthetic and ethical sense? Do we become more self-absorbed as a result? Or do we attain a better chance to “go beyond” mere consumerism?

In animation theatre, work with scenographic materials is especially provocative, because the material objects, so to speak, perform. This theatrical idiom, which is based on making objects and inanimate figurines come alive and take on corporeal form, is suited for communicating fundamental scenographic knowledge – a knowledge that can be used aesthetically, ethically and didactically.

It might be a provocation for emotional learning and for working together.

According to art researcher David Best, the artistic experience is characterised as an emotional and cognitive shock.<sup>4</sup>

So we are not dealing with a dichotomy of opposites, but with a complementary relationship. Best uses the term “emotional learning”.

“Performing for somebody” is always experienced as a very important “emotional and cognitive shock,” regardless of the institutional teaching context. Here is a cathartic effect that seems to strengthen both social and subject-specific elements and augment a special “frustration sturdiness”.

The point of departure for the stories of animation theatre may be found in both fact and fiction. Both the formal-linguistic and the image-creating dimensions are essential and take place through cooperation and through the characteristic metaphors and metamorphoses of the animation figure. The researcher Anni Gilles calls this a “dual mirror”.<sup>5</sup> She claims that the figure is the bearer of both identification and projection on the part of the player as well as the spectator. This renders the theatre form generous, but also demanding.

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4 David Best: “Rationality of Feeling”, 1992.

5 Anni Gilles: “Le jeu de la marionette – L’objet intermédiaire et son métathéâtre”.

But the performer's integrity is still protected in a special way as responsibility can be attributed to the performing figures or objects.

The animated figure communicates through a permanent alienation and, in principle, this places performers and spectators on equal footing, both in terms of the figure and the story. The figure functions as raw material for communication and, as such, become an appropriate medium of dialogical pedagogy.

Recent research into the functioning of the brain shows important results for communication through an animation figure.<sup>6</sup>

We communicate through our language, through the mime of our face and through our body language. But these expressions are often contradictory.

Here actors' theatre is especially complicated because the actor has his own mime and history within him, so to speak. The puppet or animation object is empty and free from prejudices and therefore this communication can be much clearer.

Researchers find a mirror neuron system of great interest for the understanding of how our brains function. This shows that a movement and an action is reflected in a sort of mirror in our brain when we are watching, for example, a performance.

So, we are directly affected in our brains by the mime and body language – and feelings – of the other. But this mime has to be rather simple and animated – that means in a rhythm and not like the movements of a robot. This very clear communication can be highlighted in animation theatre.

To cultivate this knowledge might be an important way to understand the emotions of other people and – maybe – for our development of empathy.

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6 Raab, Thomas: "Når bevægelse bevæger", Rapport om projektet OutCasts, 2008.

## HUMOUR AND UTOPIA

The figures of animation theatre have a powerful ability to fascinate. This is true of all basic figures, regardless of their shapes and sizes.

Humour seems to be one of the driving forces in the work. All participants – teachers and students – talk about humour in connection with the study of animation, regardless of whether it involves children or adults.

Humour breaks with habitual thinking and paves the way for positive “breaches of pattern”. Humour is related to the joy of life and it touches upon the basis of all learning.

There seems to be a close connection between humour, imagination and the fantastic. The metaphors and metamorphoses of animation theatre are by nature surprising, and they amuse both children and adults because they turn the things that we thought we had under control topsy-turvy. The figures are surreal, but – in contrast to the animated film – they move about in a real space in an interplay with the human body.

The stories and movements make use of their own kind of fiction. I call them utopian, in the etymological sense of the word: i.e. that which has no place and, in addition to this, in accordance with Ernst Bloch’s notion of utopia, which assumes a dimension of yearning and hope.<sup>7</sup>

The figures of animation theatre are challenging because they are omni-competent. Thus they become powerful signs of human action, possible as well as impossible. In the animation figure we witness the natural sizes and proportions of the body being altered completely and the laws of gravity suspended. The utopian element also relates to the movements of the players when they move the figures during play. So the utopian element also covers the set and the often unusual visual angles the plays are seen from. Certainly, performances of animation theatre may be generally characterised by this utopian feature.

The characteristic features of figurative language in the aesthetics of animation theatre and communication contribute to the development of an imagination, which I shall term “the utopian imagination”.

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7 Ernst Bloch: “Geist der Utopie”, 1964.

It is essential to stimulate the “utopian imagination” in education, because it points towards the development of divergent thinking and supplements constructive, reconstructive, and compensatory types of imagination. The typical formal language of animation theatre rests in these utopian features.

Along with the theatre-form’s practical-aesthetic fields of work, theories, and methods of communication, these subject-specific features constitute a great potential for children’s learning and social life in the 21st century.

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## PLAYING WITH PUPPETS IN CLASS – TEACHING AND LEARNING WITH PLEASURE

*The paper discusses the need to make puppets a part of everyday work in education. There is a trend in contemporary didactics to teach and learn through art, which also includes using puppets. Symbolic play with puppets complements frontal, one-way communication in the classroom, creates an atmosphere of relaxation, enables an individualistic approach and non-verbal communication, and fosters creativity. Curricular goals are achieved through simple puppetry techniques and the child is educated in a holistic way. For a child, while he/she is being creative with puppets, and especially for the teacher, the puppet is above all a medium for communication and personal interaction. The child's greatest motivation is to prepare a show, therefore the set goals are reached very quickly during preparations for the show. The teacher however, focuses on the process, in which he/she constantly monitors and stimulates the children.*

*Based on a qualitative analysis of teachers' records, the paper clarifies the function of the puppet in communication between teacher and students and among peers.*

*Finally, some conclusions are made based on research concerning the influence of puppets on the emotional state of students and teachers (their mutual relationship, the classroom climate), and on motivation.*

**Key words:** learning through art, puppet play, curricular goals, indirect communication

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, the method of using puppets for achieving curricular goals, which surpasses traditional approaches in this field, has become more and more established. When puppet-play activity is instigated in preschools or primary schools, the principles of Creative Drama and Drama in Education are being considered. When using puppets in class (in the hands of a teacher or a child) it is of extreme importance for the teacher to determine the goals of the puppet project. Planning, practising and acting are the main goals for professional puppet players, but these are only some of many goals when working with children within the scope of the curriculum. It is important to distinguish between puppet theatre, and puppet activities as a form of creative drama, where the goal is not the perfect show but the growth and development of a child/puppet-player. When the goal is education, the puppet becomes a medium for expressing the child's understanding of the world, literature, nature, social relations... When a child plays with puppets, the teacher sees the puppet as a medium for communication and personal interaction. For the child, the greatest motivation is the preparation of the puppet show, during which he/she quickly achieves the goals that were set. At the same time, the preschool or primary school teacher focuses on the process, in which he/she constantly monitors the child and motivates him/her.



## 2. RESEARCH ON THE USE OF PUPPETS IN CLASS (QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS)

### 2.1 Problem definition and research goals

The use of the puppet as a medium for the achievement of goals in class is gaining more and more recognition every day. Teachers are aware that they can achieve curricular goals by using puppets and

that they can influence the child's social and emotional development at the same time. "Drama is by its very nature a negotiated group art form and is therefore a non-reproducible experience. The participants create a unique set of social relationships within drama or theatre education. These become a single unit of experience capable of analysis and study" (O'Toole, 2006, p. 46).

The goal of this research was to find out, how teachers and children experience lessons with puppets, in which subject fields the puppet can be included, and what the cognitive, emotional and social effects of working with puppets are.

The results will help in the further planning of work with students of primary school and preschool education, and with teachers on seminars and in optional modules. They will be a guide towards the inclusion of puppets in the continuous and regular training of students and teachers.

The goal of the research is to determine:

- How teachers experience working with puppets (feelings, the complexity of preparations...)
- What kind of problems and dilemmas they face.
- How children react to working with puppets.
- In which subject fields the puppet can be included.
- What the communication in class is like.
- Which goals teachers can reach with the help of puppets.
- What the motivation for work is like.
- What the atmosphere in class is like.
- How shy children and children with learning and communication difficulties can get involved in puppet activity.

## **2.2 Methodology**

The planning of research and the qualitative analysis of data were based on articles from different authors, which prove that "the qualitative methodology is scientifically acceptable as an independent methodological paradigm" (Cencič, 2003, p. 8).

J. Sagadin (2001, p. 13). argues that qualitative research "tends to a holistic and deep capture of phenomena under most natural con-

ditions and in the context of time and place." In order to research the problem holistically, the opinions and experiences of teachers and students participating in the learning process must be included. Unlike the quantitatively directed empirical-analytic research that focuses on the analysis of objective rules, the qualitative interpretative research deals with the problem from the aspect of motive, intention and experiences of those directly included. For all the stated reasons, the interpretative approach is more suitable for our research than the qualitative approach. "Qualitative research is used describe the impact of the arts in education within the world of arts practices and focus on interpreting the construction of meaning and social process" (Copeland, 2003).

The analysis included 47 essays of teachers on their experiences with the use of puppets in primary school – only on class level. Records were written after the seminar at the Faculty of Education in Ljubljana. Some records included the statements of children, which were also included in the analysis. The statements were transcribed and analysed with qualitative analysis, procedures of adding ideas and codes, and with the formation of categories and subcategories.

The research problem was analysed from several points of view. Seven basic categories were formed: subject fields, teachers' experiences, motivation for work, communication, cognitive effects of the work, creativity and symbolic play. This article mainly focuses on the puppet's function in communication in the learning process.

### **3. RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION**

#### **3.1 Communication**

The basic instrument of education is communication between the teacher and the student, as well as between teachers, and between children. Communication does not only represent the transfer of information; it is much more. It represents the establishing of a relationship, with the person to whom we wish to transfer the information. In the process of teaching and learning, the relationships between the teacher and the student and among the students is of great importance. In the traditional approach to teaching, the conditions for good communication are not fulfilled (one-way communication, primary-

type communication, seating order...). Let us see what the notes of teachers reveal about communication during puppet activities.

### **Relaxed, spontaneous and easier communication**

Teachers speak about relaxed communication and about a spontaneous inclusion of all children in communication. Children are relaxed and easily involved in work. Teachers are often surprised that children do not need their stimulation but use their own initiative, and can even prepare a performance.



Communication flows in several directions and in several groups at the same time. The horizontal communication student to student is established spontaneously. Such connections simultaneously develop in all groups.

*"They were moving from one child to another, presenting their puppets, playing together and acting short scenes at the same time. Dialogues were created spontaneously, along the way."*

Puppets bring relaxation into communication and make children open to new knowledge. Everyone is included in the work; the involvement of individuals depends on their personal characteristics. We only found one mention in the notes where a girl did not want to join in.

*"The puppet caused a relaxed communication in class; children quickly accepted the puppet, brought it to life and felt it became part of them."*

Teachers stated that puppets have helped them establish contact with children and improve their communication with them. Puppets attracted and inspired children. Thereby, the communication and transfer of information were made easier.

*"When I think about it today, I can say that the puppet made a great impression on the children. Whenever we met, they kept asking me where my friend Luka was."*

## The puppet – a mediator in communication

In puppet theatre, the actor communicates with the audience via a mediator – the puppet. The actor must focus all his/her energy into the puppet and must become subordinate. Only in this way will mediation work for the audience. The same thing happens in the learning process, in communication between the teacher and the student, or among the students. The puppet functions as a mediator in communication and often improves it. A puppet in the hands of a teacher seems to give relief. The child is relieved of his/her fear of authority and can easily establish contact with the environment.

Teachers often have a puppet in class – the children's favourite puppet, which is always present in class. Usually, this puppet greets the children on their first day at school and accompanies them throughout the year. Such a puppet, which is often a stuffed animal, makes the first meeting easier, relieves tension and helps establish contact. Children confide in the puppet, have relaxed conversations with it, they want to touch it and stroke it. They accept the puppet as a live member of their group; they admire it and include it actively in their work. The puppet emotionally overwhelms children; it is their confidante and their ally. Therefore, communication using a puppet (of any kind) is very good, it is primary, and flows in many directions.

With the puppet's help, the teacher gets to know the children and manages to establish an individual relationship with individual students. Through puppet activities, children can express their feelings and their attitude to the world. This enables teachers to notice children's experiences and feelings, which would have been impossible without the puppet. What is more, children can express negative emotions in an acceptable way.

During breaks, children also reach for the puppet; they use it to address the teacher or to establish communication with other children through playing.

*"The real response of children to the puppet has only become evident during the school break. I was sitting at my desk, with*



*two puppets on it. Some children came closer to me and were curiously looking at the puppets. They then asked me if they could hold them. After my permission, they started playing with the puppets. The puppets were passed from one child to another and I believe that all students have been given the opportunity to try them out."*

### **A puppet guides lessons**

Puppets enable children to learn in a relaxed way, with lots of fun. The motivation for creating a puppet (preparing a scene or explaining something to the puppet that it does not know), is so great that the children immediately master the subject matter. What is more, they are not aware that they have learnt something while playing. A teacher cannot wish for more than students who are hard working and can reach their goals during their work – play!

*"Often, a conversation with the puppet develops... It is so far developed that students almost explain the subject matter by themselves. The puppet only guides them."*

*"Every day, I am more aware of the puppet's usefulness. Children can prove themselves in their knowledge. Shy children can show themselves."*

Puppets introduce a new perspective for learning about new subject matter. Children are not only passive listeners but active co-creators of the learning process.

*"Puppets make learning fun."*

*"At first, the song was rhythmically and melodically analysed. The analysis of lyrics with the help of puppets turned work into fun."*

*"Working with puppets was a new experience for me and for them. We all enjoyed, relaxed, had fun and learnt a lot."*

*"In musical education, the puppets have taken us on a pleasant journey of knowledge. We have learnt the concepts of scale and level."*

And when the puppet makes a mistake... those situations are usually funny and make the child less embarrassed because of their own lack of knowledge.

*"The star was talking to them and telling them about its journeys and adventures but it used the wrong tense. Students laughed at this and cor-*



*rected its mistakes. It admitted having slept through all Slovenian lessons and asked the children to teach it."*

I. Hamre (2004) argues that humour is an important element of the learning process. The research has shown that humorous situations with the puppet have stimulated all fields of the imagination. The conditions for out-of-the-box thinking were created. All participants in the project (Hamre, 2004), regardless of their age, stressed the meaning of humorous situations in relation to teaching and learning. A puppet can introduce surprising and funny situations visually, and with its movement and voice.

Many teachers were surprised by the effect of puppets on the memorising of poems. With well-prepared learning situations and an unobtrusive lesson by the teacher, puppet theatre awakens the need for knowledge and learning – for a simple and small puppet.

*"Some children find it very difficult to memorise the text of the song. However, with drawing, cutting and puppet playing, they learn the song along the way."*

*"Children had to learn their song by heart, which was no problem for them. I believe they had a great motivation for it – a puppet performance in front of the class."*

*"... if you had seen the joy of students while working with puppets; how much they can remember if the puppet has told them something..."*

*"Even the child with problems with memorising was able to repeat the story in the end."*

Teachers use puppet activities to test the knowledge of children, without the children being aware of that. We know that fear of exposure often prevents children from revealing all their knowledge. Indirect communication with the puppet makes knowledge-testing easier. What is more, flexible teachers can test children's knowledge in informal and playful situations with puppets. When children prepare a scene connected to a certain topic, they will include all their knowledge and experiences from that field.

*"They were surprised and have successfully repeated the subject matter of the lesson through my or the puppet's questions."*

*"...children created shadow puppets from the newspaper. In this way, subject matter from the science class was tested."*

Torrance and Rockenstein (1988, in Kroflič, 1999, p. 79) discuss teaching methods in the artistic field from the aspect of stimulus to the right-hemisphere and integrated "whole-brain" activity. They presume that every normal person has potential from which different learning styles can be developed and chosen, according to need, in concrete situations. It can be noticed in preschool that a child already uses original thinking and creative products in creative-aesthetic approaches towards reading and mathematics, to gain basic reading, writing and mathematical skills. Cognitive learning and understanding, as well as free emotional and artistic expression take place at the same time. Creative, affective and cognitive processes activate each other; they intertwine and make each other easier. For example, how can pupils learn history, geography, science and others subject fields in school with puppets? When a 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher brought history to life through puppetry (Gerstel, 2005), a student said: "The puppet show was a better way of learning than just reading it out of a book. Everyone learnt a lot about the three chapters." The research "Using puppets to promote engagement and talk in science" (Simon and co, 2008) indicates that puppets can provide a useful mechanism, to enhance children's engagement, and to promote talk involving reasoning in primary science lessons. There is evidence that when teachers use puppets children talk more readily about scientific problems, and their use of higher-order thinking (such as explanation and justification) is enhanced.

### **A puppet as a friend**

We previously spoke about the puppet as a teacher. However, according to the analysis, a puppet can also be one of the students and a good friend of the children. Children get very attached to a puppet and take it with them also when they leave the classroom. They celebrate with the puppet, play with it, and take it for a walk or even to the doctor...

During my work with children, I have had similar experiences. Children can get very attached to a puppet; they are relaxed and confide in



it. When I returned to school after a year, the children were still asking me about Benjamin – a hand puppet and the children’s favourite. “Did you bring Benjamin with you?” This has happened with children of different ages. Even older children, who were already in the 8th grade, still remembered Benjamin when we met: “Oh, it was really great with Benjamin!” In 2010 (Korošec, 2010) we did some research into using puppets in kindergarten with group of Slovene preschool teachers. We found out that only a few of the 810 teachers we asked use puppets every day, but nearly half of them use puppets once a month. Most of the time puppets are used for motivation at the beginning of the class, and quite often teachers use puppets as a friend and member of the group. Their little friend is a part of everyday life in kindergarten (in the morning, when children arrive; at lunch, sleeping and playing times; when dealing with conflicts in the group). Teachers pointed out that puppets have a very important influence on social relationships and the atmosphere in the group.

## **Being more confident with puppets**

Silent and shy children, show-offs, hyperactive and lonely children often present a problem in class. Each of them needs special support and help. Direct communication is often unsuccessful, as the child usually shuts itself away or rejects communication. Because of personal problems, inclusion into the group is not easy; often learning difficulties occur. Children have problems finding approval for their success. Playing with puppets can help them overcome such problems. The puppet is a medium, which helps the teacher with the integration of individuals into the group. It works as a medium for relaxation and release of tension. When the puppet is being created (if the teacher has a creative and open approach), the child feels accepted and can prove himself/herself in his/her own way. In this way, the child can find his/her place in the group.

During the process of socialisation, separation from parents is very upsetting for some children. Crises are an inseparable part of each developmental and maturing process. A puppet can help overcome such crises.

*“I have a boy in my group, who cried every morning when he had to say goodbye to mummy. This boy held the caterpillar in his arms even when listening to a fairytale.”*

*“This morning, Matija entered the classroom by himself and with a smile on his face. He was in a hurry to tell me about all the things he has shown to the caterpillar Cvetka.”*

*“In this way, the puppet helped me include a child in a new school environment” (Korošec, 2004).*

The puppet in the hands of the teacher and/or children creates conditions for successful communication, which preserves the child's dignity. Efficient communication is the continuous creation and revival of interpersonal values: cooperation, the feeling of personal security, self-respect and respect for others. The analysis of teachers' notes has shown that the puppet enables and stimulates the above-mentioned aspects of communication, which also enables less successful and shy children to be included in communication. For a shy child, the puppet represents protection from direct exposure and makes it easier

for him/her to get spontaneously included into the activity. During puppet activity children relax; the teachers have noticed that children change when communicating like this. The puppet helps all children overcome their stage fright, from shy children to self-confident ones. They see the puppet activity as a challenge and a possibility for creative expression. Children have said that they have less stage fright during a puppet performance and that they prefer this kind of communication. Teachers have noticed that children can overcome fear with the help of puppets and find it easier to start talking. Some notes say that children (in higher grades) were embarrassed when they started playing with puppets. They soon relaxed and were impressed and happy with the new experience.

*"They were afraid to play, to communicate with a moving object, to lead it. In the end, they were happy, successful, impressed and full of new experiences – they had a good time."*

The experiences of teachers tell us that a puppet can help the child overcome his/her fear of examinations. The child focuses all his/her attention on the puppet and is not aware that he/she is answering questions on the subject matter.

*"... positive experience from the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. A girl goes blank every time she is examined – she is not able to answer any questions. I took the puppet Nika in my hands and sat down beside her. The chat with Nika was followed by questions on the subject matter. Nika asked the questions. This was a great success. The girl answered all the questions correctly; she only had a few small problems occasionally. When the teacher told the girl that her mark would be grade 4 (good), the girl did not know when she had been questioned. She was surprised that she was not scared."*

Children with low verbal skills and with speaking difficulties are part of everyday school life. Their difficulties make it hard for them to be included in communication with teachers and school mates.

The results of working with puppets are surprising also in this field.

*"Some children have difficulties speaking in front of the public and the puppet has helped them with that."*

*"... that a very shy student can relax with the help of the puppet and performs fearlessly in front of the class."*

*"I keep noticing how children – students change when they hold the magic being – the puppet – in their hands."*

*"Over the last few years, it (the puppet) was my collaborator for the teaching of letters and for speech practice, especially with children who had stage fright."*

A child, who does not manage verbal situations very well and does not like talking, independently created the text for the puppet activity and achieved the goals for the day. A child with a speech impediment was spontaneously included in the performance, and his impediment went almost unnoticed.

*"I deliberately focused on the child, who has problems in verbal situations. At the beginning, he did not want to participate in the puppet activity and I did not force him. For a while, he observed the game of his classmates. He then approached the overhead projector, took a puppet and started playing by making up an incredible text. I can say that he really enjoyed it and (the most important thing for literature lessons), he felt the literary-aesthetic experience of the read text and was creative as never before."*

S. Peck (2005) writes that "now more than ever, puppetry has a role in building student motivation, providing opportunities to develop a love of language and literature, and so much more. Teachers should be excited by the possibility and the power of puppets".

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The puppet as a didactic instrument and a medium for the achievement of curricular goals is used by teachers in practically all subject fields of the first 4 grades of primary school. The work is based on group creativity, with consideration to individuals; the child's imagination and creativity are stimulated. According to teachers, the set goals were quickly achieved, the knowledge was acquired and the cognitive development was equal to the emotional and social development of the children.

Since the seminar, many teachers have used puppets in class for the first time. Puppets are attractive, exciting, and evoke positive emo-

tions in students and teachers. In spite of that, they hadn't often chosen to use this method before the seminar because they believed that it would be too time consuming and unsuitable for the large number of children in class. On the one hand, carrying out the lesson was a challenge; but on the other, it made them feel insecure and worry about stage-fright. They were insecure because of their lack of professional knowledge and experience in this field.

Their experiences since the seminar have shown that the puppet is an instrument which can be linked with the curriculum, and motivate the children, who are enthusiastic about this kind of work. What is more, in spite of the large number of students in class, the work runs smoothly. The work is carefully planned in accordance with the curriculum but also allows improvisation and adjustments according to the responses of the children. Sometimes, this can be difficult for the teacher, but it is also creative and represents a challenge. All teachers have mentioned the positive experience they have gained when working with puppets; they were surprised and impressed with the results of the work. Creative working with puppets has given them affirmation as well as personal and professional growth. The puppet is a working partner which creates a special atmosphere in the classroom, relaxes the children, and causes dynamic communication.



Teachers stated that there were fewer discipline problems. Children are less aggressive; even those children who usually disturb lessons participate. Children play with puppets and enjoy themselves. Therefore, the motivation for work is extraordinary. If the

puppet is animated by the teacher, the children will completely focus on the puppet and will almost forget the teacher is animating it. The puppet takes them over and they focus all their attention on communicating with it. Teachers are surprised by the role of the puppet, as



it supersedes their authority. The animated puppet draws the attention of children, who are willing to do the work carefully and quickly for the puppet. Communication between the teacher and the children improves with the help of puppets.

The creating of puppets is also linked to high motivation, as the children can hardly wait to start working. Children create puppets with a lot of joy, whilst the teacher considers the individual skills of each child. Children create such puppets as they have designed in their imagination, and thereby project their emotions and their views on the world. They are persistent in their work and willing to help others. For the children, the most important motive for work is the performance. They are all eagerly awaiting the moment when they will be able to present their puppets to school mates or even parents. The creative approach, which doesn't involve having to learn the lines by heart, also attracts shy and unconfident children, as well as those children who regularly disturb lessons. Such children often show their skills and express their emotions in puppet play but not in direct communication. Puppets sensitise the teacher to noticing the individual emotions and characteristics of children, which would be impossible during classic lessons. Because they have played puppets with the teacher, the students also trust them more in other situations. We are speaking about indirect communication, because the teacher addresses the children through the puppet. Teachers believe that puppets have helped them to establish contact with children and improve their mutual communication. The puppet releases tensions and helps the child to establish contact.

Children unconditionally believe in the life of the puppet; they trust it, identify with it in certain situations, and solve their own problems, or the problems of the puppet – and they learn along the way. Interpersonal relationships in the classroom improve; children are relaxed and spontaneously communicate with others and with the teacher. Teachers are surprised that children do not need any extra stimulation for work but work on their own initiative. They are creative, original; they do research and develop ideas individually or in smaller groups. The lessons are dynamic and all the children are included in the work, regardless of their intellectual and communication skills. Puppets make the communication more relaxed and children are open to acquiring new knowledge. The puppet also helps the teacher to check home assignments.



Children find it easier to accept the puppet's opinion and they even try harder when doing homework because they can hardly wait for the puppet to come to them and check their work.

Thus, the puppet can be a teacher who gives lessons, guides the children, checks their knowledge in a playful way, and influences the mutual communication between the teacher and the children at the same time. Furthermore, the puppet is the child's friend, whom they trust and get very attached to. It helps them overcome fear in certain situations, e.g. at the dentist, and encourages them in moments of insecurity.

An important finding is that shy children, and children with learning and speaking difficulties, also participate in communication with puppets. The indirect communication which is enabled by the puppet, encourages the child to get involved in work and start cooperating. The child is not directly exposed as the puppet represents a shield in communication with others. Beside that, the puppet can be wrong or make a mistake as well. Therefore, the child's mistake is a lesser burden. Children use symbolic play with the puppet that is not dictated by text or the teacher, to solve real life conflict situations on a symbolic level. Children can thereby communicate their problems to the teacher and resolve their frustration in a fictitious situation. If the teacher is included in the child's play as one of the characters, she can observe and get to know the child from a different perspective.

The teachers' notes show that systematic, professional training should be introduced, for those who wish to include puppet activities in their practice, but feel a lack of knowledge in this field.

This research strengthens the meaning of teaching and learning through art and with art, which is one of the trends of contemporary didactics.

*Maja Sveršina Dobravc, who is also a puppet-workshop mentor, took the photos.*

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## THE ROLE OF THE PUPPET IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

*This article deals with the inclusion of the puppet in teaching a second or foreign language – particularly Croatian as a second or foreign language – under the specific conditions of short workshops for children of various ages, with differing pre-knowledge of the language and diverse motivations.*

*Based on the author's own experience, the initial hypothesis is that the puppet, particularly when connected with the content of fairy-tales (either classic or modern), is a powerful device in establishing deep emotional connection with the subject being taught, along with higher motivation and greater efficacy in adoption of the material in question. The Little Summer School of Croatian Language and Culture, organised by the Croatian Heritage Foundation since 1993, is aimed at the children improving their knowledge of Croatian at the daily workshops, and their becoming familiar with the historical, cultural and natural heritage of Croatia. The core question is how to stimulate the interest of children of Croatian emigrants and minorities from other countries in getting to know the language and culture of the country of their forebears and/or how to maintain or increase that interest.*

*The puppet has shown its importance in the role of motivator, eliminator of inhibitions and an integrating element for a group of children who barely know each other. It has stimulated or increased the interest of children in getting to know the language and culture of the country of their forebears. The use of the puppet, particularly when connected with the content of fairy-tales, has shown itself to be a powerful device in establishing deep emotional connection with the subject being taught, along with higher motivation and greater efficacy in adoption of the material in question.*

**Key words:** puppet, education, child, foreign language, second language

## 0. INTRODUCTION

The need for and importance of using the puppet in the educational process is being confirmed by increasingly widespread practice and the growing number of professional papers on the subject. This article deals with the inclusion of the puppet in teaching a second or foreign language – particularly Croatian as a second or foreign language – under the specific conditions of a brief workshop for children of various ages, with differing pre-knowledge of the language and diverse motivations.

My article's objective is to contribute to the expansion of knowledge on use of the puppet in the educational process, to stress the importance of the art of puppetry with its unique ability to communicate, and to encourage creative ways of using puppets from earliest childhood and throughout life, these also being the aims of the UNIMA "Puppets in Education, Therapy, and Development" Commission.

## 1. THE PUPPET AS AN AID IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

The puppet can be an aid in teaching the most diverse subjects, and the Croatian author, actor, puppeteer, critic, theoretician and puppetry historian, Milan Čečuk, was well aware of that fact. He wholeheartedly promoted the introduction of puppetry in schools and was particularly engaged in co-operation with the *Jordanovac* Experimental Primary School in Zagreb, in which the puppetry group came upon the original idea of joining the puppet theatre with various teaching subjects. This was not related only to those subjects that one could expect to be linked with theatre – language, literature, history – but also subjects such as biology, physics, chemistry, technical education... Čečuk himself wrote texts for that school theatre and arrived at "the firm conviction that there is almost no teaching discipline which – if a suitable theme were selected – could not be transposed into the magical legend of the stage puppet" (Čečuk 2009: 77).

The puppet offers numerous advantages and diverse potentials that can be used in the educational process. One of its most significant advantages is its potential for humour. Ida Hamre underscores the im-

portance of humour in the teaching process. In her view, it is “underestimated. Humour should be taken seriously. It opens up to a field of freedom and courage” (Hamre 2004: 8), but actually “animation theatre always appeals to our sense of humour, mainly because of the irony of the animated figure which always refers to man” (Hamre 2002: 8).

The puppet is particularly suitable for language teaching, as with the mother tongue, so also with all other languages that follow, since: “In games with a puppet, speech develops and is enriched naturally. Because of its vitalising components, the puppet leads the child naturally into speech communication” (Ivon 2010: 59). “The puppet stimulates the child through play to think up unexpected linguistic constructions or harmonies, longer monologues and dialogues, to play with voices, syllables, words, grammar forms, to invent new words, and to find the most concise and best expressions for what it wants to say” (Ivon 2010: 60).

Playing with a puppet directly prompts the child to use speech. It is known that introverted and timid children discard their inhibitions more easily with puppets and venture into active speech. So it is the puppet that is the ideal teaching aid for the development of speech, both in regular classes and in extracurricular activities. (...) Through activity in a puppetry group, advancement in discussion games, oral dramatisation, creative narrative and re-telling, conceiving puppets and stage space and the like are also stimulated. Various communicational situations that are organised offer a range of possibilities for initiating the speech expression of the pupil



*Little Red Riding-Hood – a puppet made of a wooden cooking spoon and fabric.*

with other children or even with adults, as well as exercising the use of speech in everyday situations” (Vukonić-Žunič and Delaš 2006: 81).

**That which relates to a small child just learning to adopt its mother tongue or first language, can also be applied to later teaching of a second or foreign language:**

With the fledging speech skills, children are still unable to express many things with words, whereas drama with puppets considerably broadens the arsenal of expressive means available to them (facial expressions, body movements, puppets, and different sounds), thus helping the child express his thoughts with non-verbal mediums (Brèdikytė 2002: 45-46).

**The puppet stimulates spontaneity in linguistic expression:**

When a child identifies with a stage puppet and speaks in its name, his speech becomes spontaneously natural and expressive and the child is inspired by the puppet to change its sound according to the character and the mood of the personages (Pokrivka 1980: 48).

**The puppet is a perfect aid in freeing a child from inhibition. Since it does not “live”, that is, does not exist until it is animated, until it is in a mutual relationship with its animator, the stage puppet necessarily demands communication. By animating the puppet (by voice and movement), the child identifies with it while remaining separate from it. The puppet challenges the child, entices it, stimulates the child to play, but remains “something else”. Hence, a child who is not sure of his knowledge of a language, or who knows that he speaks it poorly, will prefer to use the language in play with the puppet, because “that is the puppet talking”, and the puppet is at liberty to make mistakes, to be funny and to be awkward. In fact, a child, who has complete control of the puppet, will feel superior and thus gain self-confidence.**

The puppet provides the child a kind of cover, behind which he/she can hide. So a timid child can also find motivation to speak (...). Hence, the puppet helps the child to communicate much more spontaneously (...). The puppet is an authority, selected by the child himself. (...) Since a child is not able exactly to express directly in words all his feelings, puppet heroes help him in finding the words and even more: another point of

view. Additionally, children who are accustomed to use puppets in their everyday conversations, have richer vocabulary (...) (Majaron 2002: 61).

Activities associated with puppets and drama are very helpful for development of the child's individual capacities and new, authentic, personal ways of communication. (...) The puppet is an exceptional means of motivation and enriches the child's emotional and social potential (...) (Korošec 2002: 29).

## **2. THE NEED FOR AND SPECIFICS OF TEACHING THE CROATIAN LANGUAGE**

Croatia is an exceptionally emigrational country. It has 4.5 million inhabitants but probably the largest Diaspora in proportion to its population today of all the European countries. No exact information is available to establish the total number of Croatian emigrants, although it is estimated that almost as many Croatians live outside of Croatia as there are in the original homeland. Autochthonic Croatian minority communities or enclaves exist on the territories of neighbouring countries (Italy, Slovenia, Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, Serbia, Romania, Montenegro), and there is also a significant economic and/or political Diaspora of Croatians whose forebears emigrated to various countries on all continents (as well as Europe, largely to the United States and South America, and to Australia) looking for a livelihood or fleeing from political persecution.

A large number of them maintain emotional, family and culturological links with Croatia. One of the organisations that devotes attention to Croatians outside of Croatia is the Croatian Heritage Foundation founded in 1951, "whose mission is the nurture and development of Croatian as the inherited language and of the customs of Croatians living outside the mother country. Therefore, the Croatian Heritage Foundation (the *HMI*) has organised specific cultural, educational, publishing, informative, sports and other programmes intended for all Croatian communities outside the homeland with the aim of preserving their identity and connection with the mother country" (Kanajet-Šimić 2010).

The teaching of Croatian as a second or foreign language<sup>1</sup> is being given increasing attention and better methods are being sought. Creative teaching concepts are being applied with particular focus on the use of the puppet in the educational process, since “puppets and puppet theatre are an excellent teaching tool in infant, primary and secondary school education (2 to 18 years)” (Debouny 2002: 69), and can also be used very successfully in work for adult course-takers.



*Animating an object – an improvised Wolf puppet who has just swallowed Little Red Riding-Hood's Grandmother.*

“The experience of various lecturers shows that some beginners feel constant embarrassment in learning the Croatian language, since it takes a fairly long time for them to be able to express themselves in Croatian and/or they cannot respond to general questions in a grammatically acceptable way. In other words, it is very difficult to speak coherently until they master the basics of its complex morphology, for which they have to invest great effort” (Cvikić 2005: 317-318). It is natural for small children to chatter, to babble, mastering a language (both the first and every following one) with the help of attempts and mistakes. Adolescents, for their part, already want more time and

thought in order to master the rules and correctly answer in a foreign language, and feel uncomfortable when they make mistakes (Weinstein 1975). Course-takers of all ages can be helped in that by the puppet

1 The difference between the second and foreign language is understood in the following sense: “The prototypical foreign language is the language of another country that is not spoken in the country in which it is being learnt, neither as the official language nor as the language of education. In other words, it is being learnt outside of the country in which it is spoken. The prototypical second language – is the language that is learnt by inhabitants in the same country who are born in that country and who have adopted that language from birth as their mother tongue (and) a language differing from the main environmental language, that is, the state and official language” (Jelaska 2005: 29). However, no difference will be made in this article between the second and foreign language, since “in many cases, the difference between Croatian as a second and foreign language is not important because the main developmental phase in mastering a second and foreign language does not differ at all” (Jelaska 2005: 4), particularly under the circumstances of the puppetry workshop described herein.



as a creature that does not belong to the real world, that can be grotesque, and for which it is immanent that it expresses itself in short, often elliptical sentences, a creature that is permitted to make mistakes and to be comical.

## 2.1. Little Summer School of Croatian Language and Culture

One of the Croatian Heritage Foundation programmes is the Little Summer School of Croatian Language and Culture intended for school-age children “who are living and being educated outside of the Republic of Croatia, the basic objective being to advance their knowledge of the Croatian language and to familiarise them with the cultural and natural heritage of Croatia and the region in which they are staying” (Kanajet-Šimić 2010). It has been held in Novi Vinodolski in July each year since 1993. In order to familiarise them with the components of Croatian identity in the most interesting, creative and stimulating way, work unfolds in workshop form, and one of those is the puppetry workshop.



*Rod puppets – Cinderella and the Prince.*

The workshop form of activity has shown itself to have numerous advantages: the possibility of correlation between all content important to the subject, in this case the preservation of Croatian identity (language, culture and natural heritage, history, geography, music, tradition...), the interactive approach to teaching, freedom of expression, improvisation, elimination of fear of mistakes, the equal importance and equality of all the participants, the suitability for all ages, all levels of language knowledge and all socio-cultural frameworks, with improved motivation (Kanajet-Šimić 2010).

The programme encompasses a language, drama, journalism and puppetry workshop, a workshop on Croatian culture and natural heritage, as well as sport, recreation and entertainment. "Puppetry and drama games and exercises have stood out in our work as the most effective activities that help in the understanding and mastering of each theme" (Kanajet-Šimić 2010).

### **3. AN EXAMPLE OF TEACHING THE CROATIAN LANGUAGE IN A PUPPETRY WORKSHOP**

The workshop programmes in the Little Summer School of Croatian Language and Culture take place for an hour and a half each day over eight days, while the last day ends with a closing show and presentation of work done. So, in all, the workshop itself lasts for only 12 hours. Such a short period does not allow for closer acquaintance with the interests and capabilities of those in the class, but it does influence the building of the puppets and the selection of the text.

Besides, it frequently happens that the children taking part in the workshop do not know each other and differ from each other to a considerable extent: they come from diverse language environments, are of different ages, have different pre-knowledge – some growing up in environments in which Croatian has been spoken as a second language since their early childhood, while, if it is similar to the language of the country in which they live, they have no trouble whatsoever with understanding, while others know only a few Croatian words and Croatian is a completely foreign language to them – different social and economic status, and are of different character and different motivation.

In the first class the children get to know each other and the leader of the group. The puppets – brought by the group leader – can help at this stage, since they remind the children of their own toys and experience them as something familiar and close, which in itself invites them to play. On the other hand, they are sufficiently different from their familiar toys to awaken their curiosity, so they want to pick them up, to try them out and to see what they will be doing with them. Shy children often find it easier to speak through the puppet, because they feel that they are not revealing themselves in that way, and their fear of making mistakes in language is lessened.

A small child approaches a puppet with no reservations, as a well-known friend and ally, while older children play with it in the manner of detachment, irony, caricaturing people the child knows, shifting around the parts and personages of familiar stories, and the like.

### **3.1. The text as the starting-point of the puppet play**

Since the Little Summer School... works primarily as a language and not as a puppetry workshop, where the objective is to master the language, the starting-point is not usually the puppet but rather the text.

The text for the puppetry performance can be:

- a set text;
- a dramatisation and/or adaptation;
- the personal creation of the children in the group.

#### **3.1.1. The set text**

A set, complete, previously written text serves for memorising words and linguistic structures. It is suitable for children with poor knowledge of the language. Short poems and short dialogue forms are appropriate for small children. For example: the group leader proposes (reads) several short texts. The children themselves select the one that they like best. The texts must be short and simple but still sufficiently intriguing for the child to want to learn them and present them to others (at the final show). Then the puppets are either chosen or made that will best suit the personage(s) who will be speaking

the lines. The same text is spoken (first read) by various children, and then by the various puppets, one after another. Through the play, the children memorise the texts and thus master certain words, language structures, and stylistic figures.

Older children can memorise longer plays and even real dramas, but it is more beneficial for them to create their own text.

### **3.1.2. Dramatisation and/or adaptation**

Any literary work (a fairy-tale, classical or contemporary story, a short story, a novel...) can be dramatised, while a film, play or theatre show can also be taken as the model.

The attractiveness of the fairy-tale for small children is well known to parents, teachers, educators and psychologists. Bruno Bettelheim claims indeed that "of the entire 'children's literature' – with rare exceptions – nothing can be so enriching and satisfying to child and adult alike as the folk fairy tale" (Bettelheim 2010: 5). However, it is obvious that the firm structure of the fairy-tale has shown itself to be attractive to older children, too, especially those who have not initially shown very much imagination or inclination towards improvisation and invention of their own content, and who have been uncertain in their knowledge of the language. A familiar story that they knew or could easily recall with help, offered them the pleasure of recognition. For its part, the possibility of changing around the story and the characteristics of the personages offered them a feeling of superiority, so that they were prepared to speak out in what was to them a foreign language.

Apart from firm stories, the fairy-tale also provides a good foundation by its characters, which are very clearly drawn, archetypal, and characterised merely by main but very distinctive features. They are unmistakably divided into good and evil, beautiful and ugly, wise and senseless. The unambiguous and unchanging personages, the simplicity of the motivation, the utilisation of symbols and stylisation are common to both the fairy-tale and the puppet theatre. Besides that, the fairy-tale can also have the emotional value of remembrance of childhood, the homeland from which the child originally came, and his parents or his grandmother, who perhaps told him that very fairy-tale.

Whichever work is taken as the model for the puppet play, it is important to simplify it, not only because of the limited knowledge of the language but also because the puppet does not tolerate a lot of text. It cannot bear monologues, while the dialogues have to unfold in short lines, helped by action.

This is an example. There are tales that are known to almost all children. Some know them by heart, other perhaps very superficially. *Little Red Riding-Hood* is such a tale. Almost all children know the story. The group leader prompts the recounting of the story of Little Red Riding-Hood. They all take part: those who can barely remember it and those who know more and augment the knowledge of the others. When they have told the story, the children take the prepared puppets if there are any, or make their own. It is better if each child makes its own puppet, because the child and the puppet are then connected in a particular way. The initial situation is singled out: the Mother calls Little Red Riding-Hood and sends her to her Grandmother's with a basket of food. One child is Mother, another Little Red Riding-Hood. A third child can be the basket – particularly if it is necessary to include a child who is inhibited and does not want to speak in what is a foreign language; it does happen that the basket also finds something to say! If there are few children, one child can play more than one role, if there are more of them, new personages can be introduced (for example, Little Red Riding-Hood's friends, or her dog, or animals of the forest who help her, or the Hunter's dog, or even the food in the basket). We move onto the next situation and onwards in that order. The text is written down, practised and presented at the final show.

In the case of an unfamiliar story, the group leader reads it or tells it. In addition, if the children have been to a puppet theatre or seen a story on television, they can tell it from memory.

Variations on the theme are also possible. For example, the children play how Cinderella goes to a shop to buy shoes (or just one shoe!). Or: a terrible wolf has wandered into town. Or: the dwarfs on their first day in school. And so on.

If the text is unknown to the children, the group leader first reads it to them, speaks with the children about the text and explains the unknown words. After that, the work method is the same as with the



*Puppets for The Ugly Duckling.*

familiar fairy-tale. The initial situation is selected, the children enter into the spirit of the situation, choose their roles – which can be changed later – and improvise. The group leader remembers and notes down their lines. That is how each situation in the text is dealt with. In the end, the group leader him/herself or with the children – or only

the children if that is possible – shape the noted lines into a coherent drama text. The children learn the lines and practise them with the puppets. Sometimes, the story will be exhausted by the improvisations themselves. In that case, there is no need to insist on the same original story, but rather to move onto the new one.

### 3.1.3. Creating their own text

Creating the children's own text can be prompted in various ways. One can start out from some sentences (spoken by one of the children, the group leader, or taken from some written text, for example, a headline from a newspaper or something similar), from a character (a particular character from the present, from history, literature or imagination, and then the story is woven around it), from personal experience (for example, the first encounter with the sea), from an object (the children bring with them the most diverse objects, such as a pencil, a book, a fluffy teddy bear, nail polish, a spoon, a light-bulb, toothpaste, a stone... or imaginary objects such as a flying saucer, a sack with gold constantly falling out of it, a ball that never misses the goal, and the like; each of them can in itself be a "switch" for turning on the story or the group leader can set certain objects that have to be logically connected into a story) (Renfro 1979). One can start out from a set initial situation that is solved in a realistic or fantastic manner: the group leader tells the beginning of the tale, while the children themselves continue it (for example: children on holiday by the sea go out

sailing, but are caught up by a tempest at sea; or: a boy finds hidden treasure in an underwater cave).

The children themselves build up the plot, the problematic situation, they solve it themselves and construct the denouement. They select or make the puppets and rehearse the play.

It is not expected of the children that they “act”. They do not have to know how to animate the puppet, or even to change their voices. The mere fact that they direct attention to the puppet and separate it from themselves helps them towards freer expression, because “it is not them talking, but the puppet”, and the puppet is permitted to make mistakes, and it is even desirable that it is funny, because that entertains the entire group.

### **3.2. The puppets and other elements of the performance**

The puppets worked with can be made stage puppets (rod puppets, hand puppets, eventually even quite simple marionettes on wire) or any other objects found nearby: hats, caps, socks, eye-glasses, bags, pencils, note-books, chairs, wood, stone... etc. The human palm, elbow, knee or foot can also be a puppet.

The children attending the Little Summer School... make their own puppets. In that way, the child imbues “soul” and character into the puppet’s expression, what the child thinks of it, and becomes connected with it in a particular way. The puppet-making process is also used for unobtrusive teaching of the language. In the process, the children use words that denote the accessories they use (scissors, glue, paper, sponges...), various paints, objects, props or parts of the scenography (a house, flower, sun, moon...), personages (boy, grandmother, dog, friend...), and that in sentences in which they also learn the declination of the nouns and conjugation of the verbs.

Rod puppets are usually used, on one or two rods (for example, for the animal characters). They can be three-dimensional or flat. For example: for the head, a ball or sponge or styrofoam is slipped onto the rod, and a piece of fabric that falls freely is attached beneath the puppet’s head. Hair (of wool, fabric or something similar) is glued to the head, followed by the eyes and the nose. The entire face can be

made or drawn, as can its parts. Another possibility is making very simple puppets out of wooden kitchen spoons.

It is important that the puppet be simple, "that it fulfills the demands of being puppet-like, that it be reduced to a symbol and not present a realistic imitation of a living character, that it be compact, stylised, poetic, and easily read off in the visual art sense, that it represent a particular character" (Pokrivka 1980: 22). So the puppet Curious Kate will have large curious eyes and a nose for sniffing around everywhere. Little Red Riding-Hood will have a red cap and that is enough to designate her role. The puppets playing in a single play are made in a single style, from the same material (if the material is sponge, then all the puppets are made of sponge; they could be made of paper, wool, fabric... etc.). Otherwise, the children are given complete freedom to make the puppets as they like. "If the child thinks it looks like a lion, then let us call it so!" (Hunt & Renfro 1982: 19).

The puppet can be played behind a screen or without a screen. The animators can be in full sight (particularly if they are using table puppets), but they can also be concealed by a screen (which is usually simply a stretched-out sheet). Naturally enough, combinations with a "live" actor and a puppet are also possible. The screen plays the role of a sanctuary that is willingly used by shy children.

The scenography is quite simple and symbolic: a house or only a window, a tower that indicates the entire castle, one tree denoting the forest, and the like.

The music can be recorded, but live music performed by those children who can play an instrument or the voices of children who sing pleasantly is particularly worthwhile. Sound effects (the patter of rain, the sound of horses' hooves, the neighing of horses, guns firing...) can also be recorded, but it is more interesting if the children create the sounds themselves (with plastic bottles and glasses, lids, wooden sticks, aluminium foil, paper or their own voices).

The prepared play is performed at the final show, at which all the workshops present their work. Although the final show is not the objective, it has been shown to be powerful motivation for continuing workshop activity.



#### 4. CONCLUSION

Participation in the puppetry workshop engages the children universally through making the puppets, the décor and the props, creating the texts, seeking out the best acting and puppetry expression, through selecting and/or performance of the music and various sound effects, joining together in that way various artistic expressions. Thus, the diverse interests and capabilities among the children come to the fore on an equal footing: some are more engaged in drawing and painting, making the puppets, and finding technological stage solutions, while others prefer to devise the text, or even act, play an instrument, sing, produce various sounds, and the like.

In teaching a second or foreign language – particularly Croatian as a second or foreign language – under the specific conditions of a brief workshop for children of various ages, with differing pre-knowledge of the language and diverse motivations, the puppet has shown its importance in the role of motivator, eliminator of inhibitions and an integrating element for a group of children who barely know each other. It has stimulated or increased the interest of children in getting to know the language and culture of the country of their forebears. The use of the puppet, particularly when connected with the content of fairy-tales, has shown itself to be a powerful device in establishing deep emotional connection with the subject being taught, along with higher motivation and greater efficacy in adoption of the material in question.



*Translated by  
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*Puppets made of wooden cooking spoons and collage paper.*

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## PUPPETRY FOR DEVELOPMENT

*This chapter offers an overview of Puppetry for Development, locating it as an integral – but also separate – branch of the wider Theatre for Development area of work. The overview explores the historical and geographical contexts of puppetry in developing countries, and its relationship to other organisations, in particular international aid and development organisations. The writer goes on to examine the particular attributes of puppetry which make it appropriate for use to explore and debate social issues, including its ability to depersonalise characters and situations, be more outspoken than human actors, entertain as well as educate, to break taboos, to reinforce and affirm local cultural traditions, to bring communities together in collective making processes, and to act as intermediary within communities and between people. It also emphasises its power as a visual form of performance which can work well with the research methodologies of aid organisations, such as Reflect. The article notes particular examples of Puppetry for Development in the areas of healthcare promotion and prevention, literacy projects, advocacy and voting patterns and within refugee camps. It places particular emphasis on its power to be participatory and interactive, and makes a case for its power as a tool for development. Three case studies of companies and individuals undertaking significant Puppetry for Development projects are discussed: CHAPS in Kenya, which was set up primarily to focus on healthcare, but has developed into a wider organisation working in many areas of development; the practitioner Gary Friedman, firstly in South Africa with a series of puppetry for development programmes and Australia; and Small World Theatre in the UK who use participatory techniques, including puppetry, to bring people together in pursuit of common aims.*

**Key words:** puppetry, development, theatre for development (TfD), healthcare, participation, community

Puppetry for Development is a term that until recently has been much practised but little used. This chapter offers an overview of Puppetry for Development frameworks, practices and contexts. The term refers to the use of puppetry within the broader area of theatre practice known as Theatre for Development. “Theatre for Development”, which is often known as TfD, refers to theatre practices which are used in development situations, often as part of an approach within the programmes implemented by NGOs and other organisations concerned with the social goals of a particular community.<sup>1</sup> The term first began to be used in the 1970s due to a growing recognition among theatre workers and scholars of the wide uses of theatre to achieve social aims. This coincided with the growth internationally in participatory techniques within theatre and the use of popular and street theatre techniques, often coupled with a political purpose. The term “development” itself is somewhat contentious and has been much debated.<sup>2</sup> The use of the expression “developing countries”, or “countries in development”, was sometimes used as an alternative to “third world countries” and referred to countries where a number of major social and health objectives established by global organisations such as the World Health Organisation<sup>3</sup> and the United Nations<sup>4</sup>, had not yet been achieved; these countries were therefore considered to be in a process of “development”. It has since been argued that these criteria established an artificial and misleading divide between countries, and that development situations could be found in all countries throughout the world; the divide was also considered to set up a global hierarchy of countries with economic power and those without. Historically, however, theatre for development was – at least initially – primarily considered to be theatre practices taking place in poorer countries, where there were more urgent development needs. The term is now used to discuss theatre and development projects anywhere in the world. For the purposes of this chapter, the term “development” can be considered to be a process of activity which aims to bring

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1 For a fuller discussion of this, see Epskamp, Kees, throughout.

2 For critiques of the term “Theatre for Development”, and a critique of the limitations of the form itself, see Thompson, James p. 14, p. 136.

3 [www.who.int/research/en/](http://www.who.int/research/en/)

4 [www.un.org/en/development/other/ecesa/objectives.shtml](http://www.un.org/en/development/other/ecesa/objectives.shtml)

positive benefits to a particular community in relation to specific social concerns. "Puppetry for Development", therefore, is used to discuss puppetry projects, shows and other activities which engage with a particular community in order to achieve positive social aims, or to open up debates about specific areas.

Puppet theatre has often been associated with community activities and with education, as can be seen elsewhere in this book. Theatre for Development differs from educational theatre (although it shares many of its objectives) in that its activities primarily take place outside the formalised education sector, and are characterised by a grass-roots base for generating projects. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, TfD became widespread throughout Africa, and, again historically, rather than conceptually, much of what is perceived as Theatre for Development has taken place, or developed in sub-Saharan African countries where development needs are often pressing, and where the involvement of international aid organisations is perhaps more intense.<sup>5</sup> A further reason for its development in Africa may be down to the fact that within some traditional African theatre, education and entertainment are not separated as different concepts in the way they have sometimes been in the Western world, but all theatre is considered educational in some way. It is also the case that following political independence from colonialism, which in Africa mostly took place during the 1960s, pressing development concerns became more evident, and the relationship between theatre and society was questioned as the new nation-states sought their place on the world stage. Africa, therefore, can be considered to be the birthplace of Theatre for Development in its historical sense; its mission, qualities and contexts, however, have been used in many different countries since the 1970s and go under the banner of Theatre for Development. The political and social contexts of TfD puppetry projects are many but include in particular healthcare promotion and disease prevention, especially in the area of HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention; education about healthcare, including pregnancy, birth and breast-feeding care; literacy projects with adults and children; women's and child rights; issues surrounding political processes, including voting

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5 See, for example, Blumberg, Marcia (2001) *Puppets doing time in the age of AIDS*. In: Haedicke, Susan C. and Nellhouse, Tobin (eds), pp. 254 – 268.

and participation rights; and, in recent years, ecological and environmental awareness. There have also been many projects concerned with domestic violence, rape, gender issues and family/tribal/community disputes, and for conflict resolution. Puppets have also been used widely within refugee settlements as a means of entertainment, mostly aimed at children, to provide them with some respite from the harsh daily conditions they are enduring. Various groups including Rise Phoenix, Puppets for Peace and Puppets Without Borders have travelled to refugee camps in Bosnia (in the 1990s), the West Sahara, Eritrea and Somalia to work with refugee children, creating performances and workshops in which the children are able to make and keep their own puppet<sup>6</sup>. These initiatives mostly work with international aid organisations and are under the auspices of UNICEF or the United Nations. It is usual for TfD puppetry practitioners to be partnered with a local or international organisation which has a development agenda, and so the methodologies, processes and reflections often go hand in hand with specific development approaches. These may include data collection, reporting and both quantitative and qualitative analyses. Puppetry has sometimes been used as a research tool for future programmes of work, as people are often more willing to talk to a puppet than a government official. Theatre for Development can therefore be characterised as theatre which includes the following elements: a) a high degree of participation from the local community, to debate social issues, and as decision-makers within interactive processes; b) theatre which uses popular techniques, including masks, puppets, music and storytelling, for example; c) theatre which aims to achieve specific social objectives; d) an element of training, or programmes for sustainability of the proposed social programme. Puppetry has always played a significant role within TfD; theatre practitioners have harnessed the particular qualities of puppetry to use within their theatre programmes, although until recently there have been few studies which examine puppetry for development as a separate and particular phenomenon in any detail. Frequently, puppetry for development is used by theatre performers and practitioners in addition to other performance resources, such as storytelling and movement. In addi-

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6 See [http://jigantics.com/section/49532\\_balkans\\_with\\_rise\\_phoenix\\_1993\\_2001.html](http://jigantics.com/section/49532_balkans_with_rise_phoenix_1993_2001.html) and [www.puppetswithoborders.org](http://www.puppetswithoborders.org) and [www.puppets4peace.com](http://www.puppets4peace.com)

tion to the specific characteristics of Theatre for Development, puppetry possesses additional attributes which are beneficial to the form, which will be discussed at more length below.

The peculiar and fascinating features of puppetry within TfD are primarily concerned with the effect of depersonalisation. Puppets, although they may represent characters, are not human; there is always therefore an element of depersonalisation or distance in their use. Audiences are aware that the puppet performs a kind of “other” being within a staged action, and can not therefore be associated too closely with an individual, in the way an actor or director can. This gives them a huge amount of license. TfD often deals with extremely sensitive issues which may be difficult to discuss directly, or represent with live actors. This can be seen, for example, in the use of puppetry for sexual health education (widely throughout Africa, but also elsewhere). Social mores in relation to sex are often surrounded by cultural and historical codes of behaviour which may prevent people discussing sexual health openly, or exhibiting sexual behaviour. These codes are deeply embedded within each society’s consciousness. The use of puppets can prevent embarrassment and inhibition to a large degree. Puppets can also be used to demonstrate the uses of contraception, again due to their “otherness”, and also due to the possibility of constructing puppets which are able to demonstrate anatomically relevant practices. Sexual inhibitions and attitudes are also bound up closely with perceptions of gender appropriateness within local communities, and to transgress these, even if only in discussion form, is potentially dangerous and harmful for the participants. Using puppets, however, enables people to suggest that the conversations are not coming from within themselves, but from an outside source which is out of their control. This has been seen in many healthcare promotion programmes in Africa (see examples in case studies below, amongst others). Puppets have been used to perform shows about safe sex, HIV prevention and AIDS awareness in general, a huge issue in most countries in Africa. Puppets have also been used by healthcare workers to demonstrate various aspects of healthcare, including the use of puppets to promote breastfeeding, vaccinations and the importance of clean water for drinking. As they are depersonalised, the message can be transmitted more clearly.



Closely linked to this idea of depersonalisation and being able to talk about sensitive subjects is the facet that puppets possess to be able to go further and be more radical in their discussions. Again, this is attributed to the fact that – perhaps related to animistic collective memory – there is an existing belief that puppets have their own life and soul and therefore, when they speak, they are not being spoken by the operator, but by some other force. There are several delightful examples in history of puppeteers getting out of trouble by blaming their puppets, and even of puppets being arrested/punished/executed for going too far. Within the TfD context, therefore, due to their transgressive character, puppets can go to extreme limits within the discussion or performance of a sensitive social issue. They somehow possess the license to speak the unspeakable or the taboo thoughts in people’s minds. Troupe Mongnon, a Malian company, led by Maa Kone, created shows to discuss the place of religious schools in Mali and the treatment of children by marabouts (religious teachers). This subject was considered taboo in Mali at the time and therefore perhaps puppets were the only way to open up debate. Similarly, Small World Theatre, a company based in Wales, were invited to create a project in Tanzania about women’s voting rights, which had previously been taboo and efforts to encourage more women voters had met with considerable local resistance. The project ended up using giant puppets to represent different points of view and the puppets therefore became a conduit through which the community spoke: each member of the community who contributed addressed their comments to the puppets and not to the other people within the group. The puppets then fed these back to the other puppet, and an open debate ensued<sup>7</sup>. Puppets can therefore act as mouthpieces for a community to voice and express difficult or sensitive issues, through performing social dramas which expose material situations, or through acting as mouthpieces for conflicting views and opinions.

This potential puppets have to transgress and to speak out of turn, can also make them funny and adds the quality of entertainment to discussion of often very serious issues. The topic itself is lightened by the use of puppets and people are often able to laugh at the process and the issue itself. In the UK, recent experiments have been done in

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7 See [www.smallworld.org.uk](http://www.smallworld.org.uk)

the area of sexual health again, where a puppet show was performed in Exeter to a group of daycare visitors, about erectile dysfunction in elderly men. The use of puppets made it comic and accessible to the audience, who were also of a generation for whom discussion of sexual issues was more difficult.

There are many instances of puppeteers being employed to implement literacy programmes, both within and outside formal school and education frameworks. Similarly, puppeteers themselves have created shows and workshops designed to promote language learning and literacy skills, often working with a government's literacy initiatives. There are numerous examples of this throughout Asia, in particular. A significant number of puppeteers have collaborated with the Literacy Mission India to develop programmes to foster and further reading and writing skills; these include, among others, Ishara Puppet Company, Aakar, Calcutta Puppet Theatre and the Darpana Academy of Performing Arts. Similar projects have taken place in other countries throughout Asia, often as initiatives by NGOs to encourage literacy through play. As has been mentioned above, the apparent success of puppetry training programmes lies in the fun and relaxed nature of playing with the puppets, and the ability to learn alongside a puppet character who is more likely to get things wrong. The puppet thus embodies the difficulties and obstacles faced by the learner and voices their fears, mistakes and inhibitions. The human actors or participants are therefore able to feel empowered by their superior knowledge to that of the puppet.

In some cases, puppetry and masked performance form part of a local cultural tradition and so using them offers the community affirmation of their identity within local crafts and performance traditions. This is the case in much of West Africa. The use of puppets and body costumes links to spiritual beliefs about the place of the ancestors within culture and their role as intermediaries to resolve specific social concerns in life itself. It is usually the case that puppeteers or development workers using puppets will source and use local materials for making, which uses local knowledge and affirms identity. Sometimes the whole community is involved in the making process. This has a profound and dramatic effect in many ways: being involved in a group process of making forges strong bonds within the community for be-

ing involved in a shared activity; it enables people to share or develop local skills, and where the puppet is representative of a local character, concept or deity, the community's sense of identity is reaffirmed, which creates a level of social cohesion and ownership beneficial to the resolution of community-based problems. It is important, therefore, within Puppetry for Development, to create spaces, where possible, for community workshopping of puppets in order for the participants to suggest materials, appearances and style of puppet created.

Puppets have a further role within Tfd in that they perform largely through visual means. This is of great use where the participants are illiterate or have difficulty with the written word. As puppets perform, and in themselves are material, they are a visual representation of the community. A great deal of development work, in particular the "Reflect" approach led by ActionAid and other development organisations, is based on the idea of skills sharing and community-based mapping<sup>8</sup>. Mapping is a process through which communities explore and establish their issues, skills and situations through visual or material means, rather than through book-based learning. Within a Reflect workshop, for example, participants might make a map of their community with images of places there were problems, such as lack of water, access to sanitation, etc. Puppets are a visual map of people's identity and thus work well with visually-based learning and exploration. A project led by Edinburgh Puppet Company and funded by Save the Children in 1999 focused on child rights awareness in three separate countries: Peru, Cuba and Brazil. The company worked with children in different locations to make memory puppets of their community which were then shared across groups to gain an understanding of the icons, images and symbols that were important in each separate community, thus creating a visual symbol of the participants and their culture<sup>9</sup>.

A major aspect of uses of puppetry in development is that of participation and interaction. Puppets, as has been mentioned above, possess a great propensity to speak "outside the box", and to explore difficult or taboo subjects. They also have qualities as intermediaries,

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8 See [www.actionaid.org.uk/323/reflect.html](http://www.actionaid.org.uk/323/reflect.html)

9 See [www.creativeartworks.info/joannaboysce/commun.htm](http://www.creativeartworks.info/joannaboysce/commun.htm)

intervening and commenting on discussions and dramas. Participation and interaction in collective decision-making and debate is a significant element within TfD. The ethics of participation are at the heart of its practice; the political background to TfD emphasises its focus on communities seeking and making progress towards their own solutions. Puppets, partly due to their aspect as intermediaries and as “others”, outside a community itself, are useful and successful tools in participation. Speaking to and with a puppet can be less intimidating than speaking to or with a human actor or aid worker. Participants can often take the role of teacher or provide guidance to a wayward puppet, who is able to get lots of things wrong and still be appealing to an audience/community. Puppets are also able to provoke discussion by having conversations and dialogues between themselves, which encourages participation from the group. They thus act as both intermediaries between individuals and the rest of the community, and also as mouthpieces for the community to express themselves.

Training, sustainability and advocacy are prominent features of TfD. Puppet-making and performance workshops have often formed part of PfD’s programmes, where local performers of all ages participate in skills-sharing and training in order to continue with the programme of development through the use of puppets. Through these means the development goals stand more likelihood of being achieved, as skills are being passed on and increased; additionally, it is hoped that the initial interactions will have begun debates and initiatives that are likely to continue. Frequently, training in making and performance with puppets takes place with young people, the unemployed, prisoners or other members of a society marginalised by their situation within it. This has the function of social integration and skills development in those participants, thus offering them greater future opportunities for work and personal satisfaction. Puppets are useful advocates for change as they can poke fun at existing situations and point out their ridiculous nature, where inequalities or injustices exist within a local community. The participants thus interrogate their own place in society and the community’s vision of itself through the eyes of an outside force.

In recent years, puppetry has been extensively used for environmental and ecological education. This has particularly been the case in Central and Latin America, where there has been a growing conscious-

ness of the value, both economically and in terms of wildlife, biodiversity and cultural heritage, of their natural environmental reserves, some of which are protected by legislation. The reserves are important to the countries in terms of environmental tourism, but also for preservation of species and responsible land management. Many of these areas are managed by local communities; in Peru, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Brazil, for example, puppet projects have been set up to educate adults and children about environmental living<sup>10</sup>. The methods used are primarily through shows focusing on recycling, waste management and fire prevention, but also use sustainable methods within puppet-making workshops.

Puppets therefore offer specific dynamic qualities to Theatre for Development projects and their efficacy has been demonstrated by the engagement by participants in the projects set up. The research into Puppetry for Development is at an early stage, and it is hoped that further research projects which fully explore and elaborate its uses in development situations will be set up.

This chapter will now examine three separate case studies of Puppetry for Development which demonstrate examples of practice within the model established above.

### CHAPS, Kenya<sup>11</sup>

CHAPS stands for Community Health Awareness Puppeteers. The group was founded as an offshoot of the Family Planning Private Sector (FPPS) in 1994, following a training programme undertaken in South Africa by two members of the African Research and Educational Puppetry Programme (AREPP). The project was initially set up for puppeteers in Kenya to be trained to travel to different locations in the country, promoting population control within health education, especially in



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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, [www.gstalliance.net](http://www.gstalliance.net) and [www.greatgreenmacaw.org](http://www.greatgreenmacaw.org)

<sup>11</sup> [www.fpps-puppets.org](http://www.fpps-puppets.org)

relation to HIV/AIDS. The organisation has, however, grown considerably. Training new puppeteers has been a vital part of its work; in its early days, the group ran several training courses in puppet making and manipulation, and longer courses which included training in drama, dance, mask, music and storytelling as well as in community regeneration, leadership and planning. These programmes were run with a strong wish for many young and unemployed people to develop skills which would enable them to benefit their communities. The company (established as an NGO affiliated to FPPS) has a clear focus and intentions: to create puppet shows which address a range of social issues, to tour these shows widely throughout Kenya (and beyond), to introduce methods of participation and reflection which engage its participants in discussion, analysis, individual and community development and to develop sustainable plans for the future. The initial impact of the group was considerable: by 2004 the group (according to a report by Phylemon Odhiambo, the programme officer) had trained over 480 new puppeteers and had established up to 48 different performance groups in the country. The range of topics addressed in the different shows has included environmental conservation, gender issues, government and local corruption, genital mutilation and human rights. The significant features of CHAPS as a PfD organisation are firstly that it has placed a huge focus on training and development, which has ensured to a large degree widespread and sustainable activity; secondly, that the training and subsequent discussions and reflections have placed equal emphasis on artistic training and on individual and community development; thus construction and performance workshops went hand in hand with seminars and sessions on development processes and the best



*Euro-puppets; for community education.*

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*Giant puppets; for community mobilisation.*

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methodologies for encouraging community leadership; and thirdly that the groups have used local folk media to enhance their messages, including the use of many local languages in promote engagement with the theme of the shows. The group has worked closely with a range of local and international organisations and their programmes have been developed in conjunction with these groups; their performances and workshops have therefore always been underpinned by social agendas, and frequently funded by these. These include family planning organisations, the Red Cross, the department for international development in the UK, aid organisations, UNICEF and



*Maasai puppets; for cultural community performance.*

others. CHAPS was also closely involved in the setting up of puppet festivals in Kenya, beginning with the Edupuppets festival in Nairobi in 2002 which included performances from Kenyan, African and international groups alongside a series of workshops focusing on the educational use of puppets internationally. A further festival was staged in 2006, but limited finances have for the moment meant the suspension of more events.

CHAPS has had a very wide remit which has included the running of projects in refugee camps outside Kenya and it has provided inspiration for a range of similar projects elsewhere in Africa.

## Gary Friedman<sup>12</sup>

Gary Friedman is a South African puppeteer (who has been based in Australia for the last ten years) who has specialised in Puppetry for Development. Friedman is most well known for his puppetry activities in South Africa during the 1980s and 1990s, during the transition from apartheid to democracy. He set up a series of programmes designed to address specific social issues, including HIV/AIDS, the impact and divisive nature of apartheid, voting issues, sexual and domestic

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<sup>12</sup> [www.africanpuppet.blogspot.com](http://www.africanpuppet.blogspot.com)



violence, among others. Friedman, who studied at the University of Cape Town, was inspired by subsequent studies at the Institut International de la Marionnette in France, and by the work of the late Jim Henson and saw puppets as a powerful force for change. Friedman's approach to using puppets has always been that they cut across social and racial divides and can release latent creativity in ways perhaps unexpected by its participants. He has been involved in a number of television puppetry programmes, including ones he set up himself, teaching puppetry for film and television and now specialises in puppetry workshops for creativity. He was one of the founder members of AREPP (see under CHAPS) and developed a programme called "Puppetry against AIDS" under the auspices of this organisation. Within this programme, a show was created in which a male puppet infected a female puppet with the HIV virus, and subsequently developed AIDS, eventually dying of the disease. The show was performed at different times with both giant puppets and, later, with glove puppets. It was accompanied by discussions and debates with health workers who demonstrated the correct use of condoms and answered questions about HIV/AIDS. It is important to note that this project took place at a time when in much of Africa there was resistance from various political leaders to talking openly about AIDS, understandably not wanting it to be viewed as an "African" disease. Friedman later set up "Puppets against Apartheid", a satirical puppet show which addressed the inequalities and injustices of living under an apartheid regime, performed through the characters of *Puns and Doedie*, a take on the popular puppet form Punch and Judy. This led him to be invited to create a puppet TV programme covering the first democratic elections in 1994 and Friedman toured the country interviewing the candidates for president in the run-up to the elections, including interviews with Nelson Mandela, Pik Botha, Thabo Mbeki, Joe Slovo and others. Friedman later set up a further programme, "Puppets in Prison", where, working alongside prison workers, he created puppet shows with prison inmates to explore sensitive subjects such as violence, rape and AIDS.

Similarly to CHAPS, Friedman is an advocate for puppetry being able to say things that humans cannot; his puppets are frequently satirical, offering biting comments on particular situations, freed by the fact that they are puppets. He believes that puppets target hidden



or repressed parts of ourselves and has continued to use puppetry to explore and uncover those repressed aspects of the human individual. Since moving to Australia, he has concentrated his work, with his partner, Sharon Gelber, on developing puppetry creativity workshops which are adaptable for all kinds of different groups and age ranges, where materials and puppets are used in conjunction with kinaesthetic awareness and therapeutic processes to unleash the creative potential of the participants, increase their communication skills and relax tensions. This combination of activities such as “Brain Gym” techniques with puppetry skills have led to his being invited to run workshops in creative puppetry throughout the world.

### **Small World Theatre<sup>13</sup>**

Small World Theatre was set up and is run by two theatre-makers, Ann Shrosbree and Bill Hamblett. It began life as “Dandelion Puppets” in 1979 and became Small World Theatre in 1997, twenty years later. The focus of the company has been to use puppetry and related forms in the service of arts and culture for development aims. The company is based in Wales, and the focus of their work in the UK has been in Wales, but they have also worked in many different countries as puppetry specialists, creating participatory puppet projects. Using the model of puppetry for development outlined above, SWT has primarily been employed by NGOs and aid organisations to work with local communities to focus on specific development areas. Their partners have included Oxfam, Save the Children, SOS Sahel, the Centre for Alternative Technology in Wales, the British Council and the United Nations. Similarly to the practitioners described above, SWT hold participation and interaction at the heart of their process and believe that puppets are naturally interactive beings that can enable a community to talk about itself. During the 1980s and 1990s they worked extensively in Africa and Asia; in Sudan they created a project which discussed social forestry; in Nepal they worked on a project to do with gender and human rights; in Uganda to explore child rights. Their project in Tanzania is mentioned earlier in this chapter; the company was asked

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13 [www.smallworld.org.uk](http://www.smallworld.org.uk)

by the British Council in Tanzania to use puppets to conduct research into why women were not taking part in local elections; the process included multiple points of view, including social inhibitors to voting (such as not being allowed to, or being discouraged by one's family, distrust of politicians, fear of being thought badly of, etc.), practical methods for becoming involved and issues facing working women in that area in general. One important feature of the work (and in general of PFD) is that entertainment/performance work is conducted alongside information being transmitted. Within this project, this was enacted through a large puppet called "Bwana Democracia" being used to offer the audiences factual information about the voting process, how to register, where to vote, and so on. In recent years, the company has concentrated its work in Wales, and has set up a "Small World Centre", where the company is housed and runs most of its projects. In Wales, they have collaborated with many different organisations and projects, notably a lengthy project with the Welsh Refugee Council, which involved performances and workshops with refugee groups in detention centres and elsewhere, exploring refugees' experiences of arriving in a new place and the intercultural issues facing them. They work extensively in schools and within non-formal education with the unemployed and other marginalised groups to develop life skills and confidence through puppetry. Together with various other European organisations, they run training in diversity and global citizenship which uses puppets to identify and celebrate difference and explore the potential conflicts and disputes that arise between people from different cultural heritages. Participation, interaction and exploration of real, diverse cultural and social issues are the main foci of their work and puppets a means to carry these themes.

There are numerous other examples of Puppetry for Development projects working in different areas with communities in the pursuit of improvements in living conditions and quality of life. Only very few are mentioned here, but they form an important part of puppetry activity internationally.

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## THE POLITICS OF APPLIED PUPPETRY

*The paper concerns the ideological uses and political purposes of puppetry in education and community contexts. The paper will engage in debates about the role of the spectator using the thinking of Jacques Rancière. Reference will be made to some historical examples and practical experiences of workshops and projects. The paper will connect with the themes of, control, emancipation, normalising and imperialism. The broad question considered will be: where do we find the politics in the practice of applied puppetry?*

*For many years now the author has been using puppetry in a number of unusual settings to engage groups in work that can be considered applied puppetry. This work has opened up many different and surprising results in workshops. The author is interested in describing this work critically and developing an advanced study of puppetry as part of applied theatre in the future. These aims connect with his PHD thesis: *Speaking the unspeakable*. How can puppetry be engaged as a tool in applied theatre practice?*

**Key words:** applied, workshop, spectatorship

This polemic concerns the ideological uses, abuses and the political purposes of applied<sup>1</sup> puppetry simply defined as puppetry in education and community contexts. The politics discussed here is the “radical politics to provide an alternative view of the world, when the world is in trouble.” As defined by Jonathon Pugh.<sup>2</sup> The broad question

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1 I am using Helen Nicholson’s definition of applied theatre: The terms “applied drama” and “applied theatre” gained currency during the 1990s, finding particular favour with academics, theatre practitioners and policy-makers who have used them as a kind of shorthand to describe forms of dramatic activity that primarily exist outside conventional mainstream theatre institutions, and which are specifically intended to benefit individuals, communities and societies (Nicholson 2005:2).

2 Pugh, 2009.

considered in this paper will be: where do we find the politics in the practice of applied puppetry?

For many years now I have been using puppetry in a number of unusual settings to engage groups in work that can be considered applied puppetry. This work has opened up many different and surprising results in workshops.<sup>3</sup> I am interested in describing this work critically and developing an advanced study of puppetry as part of applied theatre in the future. These aims connect with my PHD thesis: *Speaking the unspeakable*. How can puppetry be engaged as a tool in applied theatre practice?

What is required is a theatre without spectators, where those in attendance learn from as opposed to being seduced by images; where they become active participants, as opposed to passive voyeurs (Rancière, 2009:4).



*Girl with puppet in junk puppet workshop. PickleHerring Theatre. Photo – Jonathon Purcell.*

This view of theatre discussed in Rancière's book the emancipated spectator is a challenge to the maker of political theatre. The challenge is: how do artists use theatre not to pacify but to promote change? As Rancière suggests the passivity of the spectator is one of the problems with the effect of theatre as a social/political event.

The workshop is usually the dynamic element in the process of applied theatre and in this field is often valorised over the performance event as: Process over product. The politics of applied puppetry occurs in the dynamic zone of the workshop. The workshop solves the problem of passivity in theatre pos-

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<sup>3</sup> For some examples of these practices that I have discussed please look at: Smith, M. (2009), "Puppetry as Community Arts Practice", *Journal of Arts and Communities*, 1: 1, pp. 69–78.

ited by Rancière and in this transformative forum individuals have the opportunity to change.

Richard Sennett has offered a view of the workshop in his book *The Craftsman*. Sennett suggests that: “The craftsman’s workshop is one site in which the modern, perhaps unresolvable conflict between autonomy and authority plays out” (Sennett 2009:80). Transformation is an aim of both traditional and the applied theatre forms of workshop processes. The material consciousness of the craftsman is transformed in the traditional workshop.<sup>4</sup> In the applied theatre workshop the emphasis is on the individual transforming their consciousness in relation to the groups various world views. Much of the aims of many programmes of applied theatre create and structure some form of pedagogical/cultural change as part of their aims and intentions. Often the materials allow this process to occur as is the case with the puppet workshop. The individual sees themselves differently through changing the material conditions of objects through live animation and this also changes the nature of the workshop space and the participants involved. John Fox, formerly artistic director of Welfare Sate International describes this process: “Tiny things and tiny puppets discovered and created in an environment of accessible non-competitive play can transform us totally” (Fox in Prior, 2007:23).

As part of the process of looking back at historical examples of applied puppetry the puppet often appears not as some benign cuddly force. Instead the puppets in some sources appear as dark cultural influence used for the manipulation of audiences and groups. This historical view has developed into three areas: the puppet as a weapon<sup>5</sup>, the puppet as a straight jacket<sup>6</sup> and the puppet as an ignorant school-

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4 Sennett, 2009.

5 In an account of Spanish Civil war Puppetry puppets were described as: “One of the most ancient theatrical forms, puppetry became for the republicans an element of contemporary struggle, adopting a role in antifascist propaganda which, in the words of one enthusiastic reviewer, saw the puppet as no less useful than the rifle in the successful prosecution of the war.” In MCCARTHY, J. 1998. *Militant Marionettes: Two “Lost” Puppet Plays of the Spanish Civil War, 1936–39*. Theatre Research International, 23, 44-50.

6 In Philpotts compendium *Puppets and Therapy* 1977 one experimenter says “no straight jacket could have soothed the patients better”, about the effect of the puppet on a patient and the phrase is a chilling analogy to use in regards to puppets with patients.

master.<sup>7</sup> These three negative images of the puppet provide a warning to anyone using puppets as part of applied or political theatre. The puppeteer must be careful when they wield their puppet; as an ideological force to fight the good fight, or as a treatment to normalise a damaged individual through therapeutic experiments, or as a preventative force to pacify behaviours, or as a way to teach people how to live their lives, tell them what is right from wrong and when and how to procreate.

These worrying traits found in the historical view presented here as part of applied puppetry open up difficult political questions. Historical accounts show that some puppeteers of the twentieth century have experimented with applied puppetry and sometimes perpetuated nationalistic, imperialist and at times oppressive work.<sup>8</sup>

To balance this negative view, there were many stories that I have dug up of how puppets can be a positive political force. For example, during the blockade of Leningrad<sup>9</sup>, according to the account by Faina Kostina the puppet theatre continued in the city entertaining the people and the troops at the front line.

Even in the darkest days of the blockade, we preserved our marionettes. Despite the terrible cold, not one doll was burnt in the stove for heat, even though they were all made of wood. Yes, we burnt scenery, and we burnt anything that we could get our hands on, anything but our precious dolls. When our actors were evacuated, you could take only 10 kilogrammes (22 pounds) as baggage, and everyone who left took their dolls with them. ([www.02varvara.wordpress.com/2009/01/25/the-puppet-theatre-during-the-blockade-of-leningrad](http://www.02varvara.wordpress.com/2009/01/25/the-puppet-theatre-during-the-blockade-of-leningrad))

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7 Rancière, 2009 uses the phrase ignorant schoolmaster around debates about equality in education.

8 Jurkowski 1998 and Blumenthal 2005 show clearly the relationship between fascism/communism and puppetry. Phillipott 1977 also shows some work that is oppressive in its view of the participant/audience rights. In India the theatre for development work of Bill Baird viewed from the contemporary position looks naively based on western views of the east. Presented in the document: Puppets and population, 1971, World Education, Inc, New York.

9 There was a great deal of accounts of heroic cultural activity in Leningrad during the blockade including a great deal of performance. The breadth of this is described in: JONES, M. K. 2008. Leningrad : state of siege, London, John Murray.

What this example demonstrates is the cultural value of the puppet and the need for this artform during extreme social moments. The spectacle of puppets and their “otherness” reminds the audience of their humanity in the face of death. These performances gave many desperate/traumatised people hope and this is a reason to acknowledge these artists as precursors of applied puppetry.



*Performing in junk puppet workshop. PickleHerring Theatre.  
Photo –Jonathon Purcell.*

Putting aside these historical views the next question is; how puppets can be used as a positive political tool in the hands of the applied theatre practitioner? To answer this question I will briefly give two examples from my own workshop practice.

*Example one – In the context of a secure unit, children who were detained for their own safety and the safety of the public, participate in a puppet workshop. In this secure unit they make and perform with toy theatres. They choose music and images from magazines later the toy theatres are filmed as live animations. The general positive result of this workshop was that these children learned to play again. The puppetry gave the groups and individuals the opportunity and freedom to explore play, something they found hard to do because of their traumatic lives.*

*Example two – In a rural primary school, children make junk rod puppets and perform short shows. One of these improvised shows is a satire of their teachers. This drama included the firing of the teacher by the headmistress. The tension in the room was palpable. A simple critique of the hierarchy in the school and a form of political theatre.*

To further address the question of politics in applied puppetry here are some suggestions and propositions: Put the puppets in the hands of the people as a part of a radical pedagogy based on participation





*Puppets performing over wooden wall in junk puppet workshop. PickleHerring Theatre. Photo – Jonathon Purcell.*

influenced by the ideas of Paulo Friere and Augusto Boal.<sup>10</sup> The puppet can be used as an emancipatory tool for groups to describe their world views together and celebrate their humanity. The location for this practice is the workshop as a democratic laboratory<sup>11</sup> for collectively conceiving of a new cultural landscape.

To draw this polemic to an end I want the reader to imagine and consider a new version of the allegory of Plato's cave<sup>12</sup> (the allegory in which he presents slaves whose only reality is perceived through shadow puppet images on a cave wall). In this new version imagine – If we free the slaves who were tethered to the ground facing the cave wall, whose only reality was the shadow puppet show, would the slaves return after they had left the cave and pick up the shadow puppets when it starts to rain? Inside the cave would the slaves start to perform for each other's pleasure and education? It is the slave's relationship to viewing and acting that is an important aspect of the allegory of the cave.

Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting (Ranci re, 2009:13).

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10 FREIRE, P. & RAMOS, M. B. 1972. *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, Harmondsworth, Penguin. and BOAL, A., MCBRIDE, C. A. & MCBRIDE, M.-O. L. 1979. *Theater of the oppressed*, London, Pluto Press. These revolutionaries in education and theatre are an inspiration and important source for any practitioner wanting to break down the dichotomy between actors/educators and spectators/students.

11 Again I am here drawing from the ideas of Sennett, 2009.

12 PLATO 2007. *The republic*, London, Penguin.

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## BEING CARBON NEUTRAL

### Teaching Sustainability Through Shadow Puppetry – A Practical Example of a Project to Encourage 7 – 11 Year-olds to Design for Their Future, in Schools in Norfolk, UK

*The topic of the paper is the Being Carbon Neutral project, carried out by Meg Amsden and her colleague Nicky Rowbottom in the Broads National Park in the UK in 2009. The project was supported by the Sustainable Development Fund of the Broads Authority, funded by Defra.*

*The authors believe that children are naturally inventive and optimistic. They are good at working in groups and co-operating to solve what can appear insuperable problems to individuals. They also believe that theatrical performance, and the use of innate practical skill to make things, have an unique way of engaging children's attention. The memory of these activities is long-lasting*

*The objective of the project was to encourage children to think dynamically and positively about living sustainably in a future dominated by climate change. As this is a big subject, the authors chose to concentrate on sustainable building. The paper shows how they used functioning examples of innovative practice in sustainable building in the East of England to inspire the pupils, and a live shadow-puppet show that told the story of a family whose house had blown away in a storm. A child suggests ways the family could make a new home. The story is full of visual clues but it is left open-ended. The school-children were divided into small groups, and asked to work out how the story could end, and create their own shadow shows to show it. The authors also involved the children in practical technology experiments.*

*The authors ran a pilot workshop in a local middle school, and then worked with 16 schools in the area of the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads.*

*The workshop was filmed in two of the schools, and part of the 20 minute DVD the authors made was shown at the EAEN conference in*

*Ljubljana. They use the results of an evaluation questionnaire that was completed by teaching staff in our conclusion. They also draw on the pack of teaching materials they provided to support the workshop, which included follow-up ideas, further reading, and notes on the research basis of the project.*

*(As the authors are not academics but practical environmental educationalists, there is no research question or theoretical framework.)*

**Key words:** sustainability, design, practical skill, co-operating, innovative, theatrical, performance, shadow-puppetry, technology, experiments, evaluation, teaching materials, environmental educationalists

I run a puppet company – **Nutmeg** – which I founded in 1979 to produce and tour original puppet theatre shows and practical workshops for outdoor events, schools and small theatres. My work has always had an environmental bias. I believe strongly that loss of contact with the natural world affects most contemporary children detrimentally (“Nature Deficit Disorder”<sup>1</sup>), and that most education with its emphasis on literacy and numeracy, fact finding and research, ignores the vital development of practical skills and emotional growth. We believe that children are naturally inventive and optimistic. They are good at working in groups and co-operating to solve what can appear insuperable problems to individuals. We also believe that theatrical performance, and the use of innate practical skill to make things, have a unique way of engaging children’s attention. The memory of these activities is long-lasting.

## THE BACKGROUND

Neither Nicky nor I have received formal training for teaching children. However, I have been working in schools since the mid-seventies, touring puppet shows and practical workshops, and Nicky trained and worked for many years in adult education and worked with all ages as Education Officer for Suffolk Wildlife Trust. We have both worked col-

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1 Nature Deficit Disorder – term coined by Richard Louv in “Last Child in the Woods”, pub. Algonquin.



*Drawing background.*

laboratively with education advisors and teachers, and were both much inspired by the visionary writing of Prof. Steve Van Matre<sup>2</sup>. Other sources of inspiration for me were involvement with the Woodcraft movement, and voluntary work with the progressive education charity Forest School Camps<sup>3</sup>.

For 25 years, from 1985, Nutmeg was privileged to work with the Broads Authority in the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads, a wetland National Park in the East of England. We produced and toured 17 original shows about the ecology and social history of the region to families on holiday and to local schools. We also presented papers and ran workshops at national park conferences and seminars in the UK and abroad.

The then Chief Executive of the Authority, Aitken Clark (who sadly died in 2010), was a far-sighted internationalist who believed in the power of the arts to inspire children, and indeed adults, to develop an emotional understanding and response to the natural environment. In his own words;

*"The medium of puppetry, so artfully crafted, bridges language barriers and engages children and adults alike in plots and dramas vibrant with meaning, illustrating ideas, and giving messages of exhortation to care for and cherish the lovely fragile wetland environment...."<sup>4</sup>.*

At his instigation we ran the **Ecopuppets project** from 1995 – 99, linking the Danube Delta, Romania, and the Broads, and working with teachers and children in schools, environmental artists, education ad-

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2 "Earth Education – a new beginning" and other books by Steve Van Matre, Institute for Earth Education.

3 Forest School Camps [www.fsc.org.uk/archive/index](http://www.fsc.org.uk/archive/index) for background information.

4 Ecopuppets Handbook / Manualul Păpușilor Eco – pub. Broads Authority 1999, available via [www.nutmegpuppet.co.uk](http://www.nutmegpuppet.co.uk)

visers and environmental education officers. We set up a network and ran a conference, "Delta Shadows", in the town of Tulcea in September 1997. The delegates included environmentalists, educationalists, and puppeteers from Gulliver Puppet Theatre in the nearest city, Galați. The conference, in English and Romanian, included presentations by the UK and Romanian teams, and by young eco-puppeteers from the local schools participating in the project. We ran practical workshops in writing ecological scripts, shadow puppetry, environmental art using natural materials, and making musical instruments. The puppeteers had never experienced shadow puppetry before or thought of applying puppetry in educational settings, and all the delegates enjoyed the freedom and encouragement to play.

Though the main art-form of the project was shadow puppetry, several teachers later used our methods with different art-forms, including a film project with high-school students, to great effect. One of the most enjoyable experiences for us was a completely ad hoc workshop



*Background.*

in 1998 at the isolated school of Sfintu Gheorghe, where the southern branch of the Delta reaches the Black Sea. Expecting only to talk about the project, we were delighted when teachers and the local nature warden foraged for materials, lamps and tools, created a serviceable screen out of two desks and a sheet, and they and all the older children threw themselves into a very satisfying workshop.

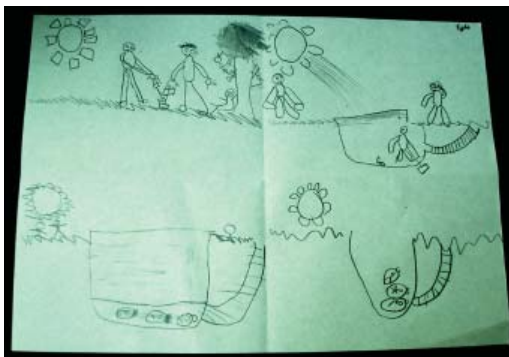
In 1999 we published the *Eco Puppets Handbook/Manualul Păpușilor Eco*, about the project, with an illustrated section of practical advice.<sup>5</sup> I returned to the Delta in March 1999 with Dr Sandra Bell of Durham University Anthropology Department with a small grant from the British Council, to study the effects of the project and make links

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

with the Danube Delta Research Institute. This in turn led to a major research project, with European funding and involving three other national parks, looking at sustainable tourism. It was remarkable to see what the small seed of a puppet project grew into.

In the UK, my colleague Nicky Rowbottom and I devised several workshops for schools to accompany shows I produced for the Broads.

For **“Windy Old Weather”** in 2005 (a show about the power of the wind, that tapped into local history, mythology, and contemporary technology), the children carried out simple experiments relating to wind power.



*Storyboard.*

For **“Heatwave”** in 2006 (a show about climate change that drew on local memories of floods in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and information from the Broads Authority’s partners in the international Living Lakes network), we devised a physical board game that showed how climate change affects habitats, and encouraged the children to describe their own experiences of the weather, and to design clothes, houses and vehicles that could cope with climate change. We found the experience so stimulating and exciting that we decided to produce a further stand-alone workshop.

## THE PROJECT

We developed the **Being Carbon Neutral** workshop for 7 – 11 year olds in 2008/9. We were awarded, funding by The Broads Authority Sustainable Development Fund which in turn was funded by Defra<sup>6</sup>. The objective of the project was to encourage children to think dynamically and positively about living sustainably in a future dominated by

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<sup>6</sup> UK Government Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.



climate change. As this is a big subject, we chose to concentrate on sustainable building, using functioning examples of innovative practice in the East of England to inspire the pupils.

In designing the workshop, Nicky and I consulted Norfolk and Suffolk environmental education advisory teachers, Sue Falch-Lovesey and Alison Wood, and teacher Jane Wells (who had headed a project involving the children to build a wind turbine at their school). We also visited sustainable building projects – a new distribution centre built for Adnams Brewery, and Crossways gigantic tomato nursery run on the power and waste products supplied by the nearby sugar-beet refinery. We researched other similar projects via the Internet.

We aimed to unlock children's imagination through the practical/theatrical medium of puppetry. We created and performed a live shadow-puppet show that presents a dilemma about sustainable living. It tells the story of a family whose house has blown away in a storm. The adults despair but the child, ever optimistic, suggests ways the family could make a new home. The story is full of visual clues but it is left open-ended. In the workshop sessions the children were asked to work out how the story could end, how the family could make a new home and live without damaging the environment, and to create their own shadow shows to demonstrate it. We also encouraged them to think about sustainable energy through practical technology experiments.

The workshop lasted a day, and we worked with two classes of up to 30 children. The programme began with our shadow puppet play, followed by a practical shadow puppet-making demonstration and a discussion with the children about light and shadows. We then showed a power-point presentation about sustainable buildings in the East of England. After a break we ran two concurrent practical workshops; one (led by me) to make shadow shows, the other (led by Nicky) to carry out simple technology ex-



*Using overhead projector.*



periments. In the afternoon, we swapped the groups and repeated the workshops, so that all the children were able to experience both.

In the puppet workshop, the children worked in small groups, inventing between themselves the story lines and the characters, and negotiating who should make what. I asked them to draw a simple storyboard or write out their story in two or three sentences, and to make a list of characters, backgrounds and props. They were limited to no more than four characters and four background scenes per story, and asked to keep spoken words to a minimum and commit them to memory, to ensure that performances were short and spontaneous. (Some children found this aspect very challenging, wanting to write scripts and read from them, so I had to explain that it was impossible to read and perform with puppets at the same time. Some groups solved the problem by using a narrator (who was allowed a script) and keeping the puppets virtually wordless.)



*Puppeteers.*

Then they were ready to design and make their puppets, using card, sticks, tape and wire, and decorating them with coloured gel, feathers, wool etc. – anything that the light would shine through in an interesting way. The main light source was an overhead

projector, so colourful backgrounds could be made by drawing with pens onto acetate sheets to place on the glass plate. As soon as everything was made the groups took it in turns to rehearse their shows, and finally performed them to their classmates.

In the technology workshop, the children learnt the difference between sustainable and non-sustainable energy, used a quiz to find out how sustainable their own lives were, tested different types of light-bulbs, and in small groups made windmills that were able to raise weights.

After a pilot workshop in a local school, we ran 15 workshop days and worked with 822 children in 30 classes from 16 schools (two tiny schools linking up together for one workshop day). 6 of the schools were in urban deprived areas, and 10 in isolated rural communities.

We made a DVD about the project with two of the schools we visited. (At the EAEN Conference a short clip from the puppet workshop was shown, in which children work together in small groups brainstorming ideas, working out a storyline and list of characters, then cut out puppets and rehearse their shows. A second clip from the technology workshop shows two girls trying to make a windmill together, and disagreeing about how to make it. One girl insists on trying her method, as the other quietly tries to show her she is wrong. The windmill fails, the quiet girl prevails and they agree on the best method. The clip ends with the girls trying out their windmill in the playground.)

## CONCLUSIONS

We produced a teachers' pack, which included follow-up ideas, further reading, and notes on the research basis of the project. It also included an evaluation form for staff.

The response was almost unanimously positive and we felt that we had produced a workshop that really filled a need, and that acted as a stimulus to further work on the subject. The only negative response we received was that they wanted more time for the workshop, or for us to be in the school for longer. We noticed that the older the children were, the longer they wanted or needed for the shadow puppet workshop, as they had more elaborate ideas and a higher expectation of themselves than the younger children had.

Here are some of the comments:

"We all had a wonderful day. The children were fully engaged in what they did and loved creating their own play. The way information was presented inspired the children and will have a lasting impact. It gives us a great platform to work from.

"All the children enjoyed themselves and experienced a feeling of achievement.

“The workshops linked in to preliminary discussion about global warming. It will link to on-going work within the school (led by school council) to raise awareness of how much energy we use/waste and how we can reduce this.

“We will be continuing shadow puppets after half term to help develop stories with a dilemma as a focus, in their literacy.

“It developed their thinking skills, generated lots of group discussion and collaboration. They also learnt about different ways of addressing global issues and what can be done to help.

“They gained a much better understanding of what carbon footprint means and of how we create it.

“I think they gained a sense of what they can do to make a difference. They loved creating and performing their own stories.

“I think it was a really good balance between creativity and factual information – activities kept their interest.”



*Straw-bales and puppets.*

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[www.fsc.org.uk/archive/index](http://www.fsc.org.uk/archive/index)

## PUPPETS AND THE EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN – AN INTERNATIONAL OVERVIEW

*In different cultures there are different views on children and their social and psychological development. Children are the same all over the world when they are very young. But as soon as they are exposed to decisions about school and education the differences between cultures get larger, as do demands on social behaviour.*

*Puppets and dolls are very important for the emotional development of children because they are substitutes for the interim objects of early childhood. They remind people of the great emotional intimacy with an object and in remembrance of this, puppets on stage or puppets and dolls in play and therapy touch our emotional memory.*

*The educational philosophies of different countries and cultures have a different influence on how children have to deal with puppets and dolls. There is a big difference between the way Eastern or Western cultures, and poor or rich children, look at puppets and dolls. Also political and religious implications influence the use of puppets/dolls.*

*While TV is entering at high speed into our subconscious without being controlled, puppet performances or children's plays with puppets have "human" speed. Through TV children get many exciting moments which give them a short adrenalin shock. Adrenalin is an addictive drug. When playing with puppets, children have time to try out situations and decisions, or look and feel with the puppets on stage, and decide if they agree or not.*

*Puppets and dolls are incomplete. They do not have a personality which can be overwhelming, demanding or judging. They do not have a history of life and are waiting for the one we create with them. They only live if we bring them to life. They are superior to all therapists, teachers and parents. They support communication on every intellectual level.*

*Puppetry is one of the most diverse tools for the communication and expression of emotions. It does not depend on the language, or manual dexterity, or intellectual competence of the participants. It is working FOR people's emotional health, both when they are doing puppetry themselves, and when they are watching a good puppet show.*

**Key words:** expressions of emotion, puppetry, special needs, international background, TV

My educational background to the theme of this paper is world-wide. I have worked through puppetry, and lectured at universities and institutions that wanted to draw on my experience in puppet therapy, and puppetry in schools and institutions for disabled people.

In different cultures there are different views on children and their social and psychological development. Sometimes it is hard to understand adult's decisions concerning children's lives and children's requests. Children are the same all over the world as long as they are very young. But as soon as they are exposed to decisions about school and education the differences between cultures get larger, as do demands for social behaviour. Understanding in multicultural societies gets more and more difficult. Children with special needs represent a special case of communication between different people.

## 1. WHY ARE PUPPETS AND DOLLS IMPORTANT FOR THE EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN?

As soon as a child gets out of its mother's belly into the cold world, a separation begins that lasts all our life. A child uses dolls, cuddly cloth, Teddy, dummy, cuddly animals etc. to cope with separating from its mother. These objects are called interim objects, because they are used as a representative of the reality ("mother") and are given all the love, all the hate and all the attempts at emotional argument with her. They are thrown into the corner, hugged, hit, sworn at, kissed etc. when the mother is not available as a partner **but also** in a figurative sense. At the age of about 5 years adults advise the child that now it is "too old" for those beloved representatives and with the school a new part of

life occurs. In the worst case the interim objects are destroyed by the adults (mostly parents). In the best case they are put into a nice box hidden at the attic. Mourning is mostly not allowed to the child nor is understood by the adults. And what we cannot grieve for will follow us throughout our life.

This phase of great emotional intimacy with an object, whose loss we could not grieve for, is the background for our emotional relationship to puppets and dolls in therapy and on stage. Both touch our emotional memory.

As soon as we are confronted with puppets or dolls the emotional situations of our childhood are reactivated – this also happens when we are adults. Our emotional memory will be activated and we feel the same emotional certainty as when there is the possibility to try out our doing and feeling with the help of our interim objects. Because puppets and dolls only give answers through what is in ourselves (mind, heart and soul) we can be sure that we will not get an answer which demands too much or too less from us, or which is not understandable by us. Objects have time on their side. They do not change, but they change us. Nothing can go wrong because we only try out what we can assess, without getting too near to the emotional abyss or falling down into it. With this quality, all puppets and dolls are ahead of humans as a partner – that includes parents, teachers and therapists.

Another advantage puppets and dolls have: they do not speak. Our communication is so secret, so individual. No words are necessary if we leave them out. This communication contains secrets which only exist between the puppet or doll – so to speak – and ourselves. We can try out a decision, an idea, and its emotional effects on us, one hundred times or more; it will never be final if we do not want it. We grow into the decision emotionally and finally decide without fear.

This is why emotional development in childhood matters. If we forbid our children to practice making decisions with “things” – puppets or dolls – or if we do not make it possible at any level, we create immature adults, who later have to make up what they missed during their childhood.

There are two important influences which alienate us from our emotions:

- one is TV where we only experience the emotions of others in an absolutely suggestive way,
- the other is being put under pressure while learning and producing.

That traumata and bad family and social situations do harm to us, we have known since before Sigmund Freud. All this harm can be worked on mostly – not always – through puppet therapy, together with an empathic and sensitive therapist.

Puppets and dolls are among the few things we can manipulate without being punished for and by them. We can order them about all we want and we take the responsibility for what we have ordered. Puppets and dolls will do all we ask and we explore the emotional side of our demands: to be powerful, to be able to order, to be king, witch, animal, princess, devil, dragon or knight. But also to be Batman, or to be one of the great powerful persons of the new media, is one of the great feelings that we can allow ourselves and enjoy by playing. Especially boys in particular need to fight against the dominance of female-orientated teaching, and have to experiment with male behaviour. In reality they mostly are not made to do so.

To get emotional competence we need emotional certainty. Of course there are many situations where we can learn this. A special opportunity for learning it is the preparation of a puppet performance in a group (school, disabled, social group etc.), that is: making puppets and building the stage, writing the text, rehearsals, inviting the audience and performing the play. You can watch the phenomenon: aggression in the group is reduced, social competence is activated and new social competence is learnt. The social fabric improves, and the result of the work is obviously better than the sum of the individual performances of the participants. Social learning is most effective when an intense factual discussion is possible. Because working on a puppet play requires many different tasks – that means that everyone can find a “corner to work on” and therefore finds emotional satisfaction – the participants do not only show their social competence but also observe and feel that of the others. This is a very important requirement for widening competition and the further development of emotions in group contexts such as: love, mourning, hate, friendship, trust, suspicion of, etc.



I have got many reports from various countries where this is described. Between North and South America, Asia, Africa, Australia and Europe are cultural differences but the results are always the same: working with puppets gives a positive input to healing on many different levels. This you will find also in puppet therapy, but then it relates to only one person and is appropriate only for them.

Not only does creating a puppet play liberate an enormous power of self healing, but also, a puppet play that an adult watches, that touches him, makes him thoughtful, makes him laugh or cry. It functions in the same way as with children. It makes possible an emotional engagement with the problems shown by the puppet's story, and takes as a basis the life experience of every single person in the audience. In other words: every spectator sees his own story and lives it. Also we have breath-taking examples of this which we can be described as cathartic.

On a puppet stage – unlike real life – solutions of problems are shown which mostly are outside reality. But the spectator looks at them and witnesses how problems are solved, how somebody suffers and finally triumphs over something or somebody. Neither the problems nor the stories are real to the audience. But the hope for suitable solutions, the informal context in which it is offered, the time the audience has to feel and to think during the puppet play, and the opportunity to see what is happening, are all part of the experiment which is made by others (by puppets). But we experience them in an active way as well.

## **2. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S PLAY IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES**

I refer to my experiences in all parts of the world – I have worked in more than 30 different countries. The philosophy of education differs very much. In North America and Asia you may find the same pressure for achievement and high standards but there are differences you can measure:

In the USA and in Europe a child has to grow up to be an independent person. That means everything is done to free it from the family and

make it independent for living alone. Therefore high standards and achievements are demanded to make the child quicker, better, higher paid than children from other families. People are admired who get on better than the others without help from others (e.g. “from dishwasher to millionaire”).

In Asia the one who honours his parents by achieving well is admirable.

Both philosophies of education are incompatible because there are no bigger differences than between externally lead (Asia) and internally lead (USA, Europe) motivation. Nowadays in Germany we are trying to implant the Asian system of education. This irritates many people.

These two different philosophies of education have immediate effect on children’s play – also on that with puppets and dolls. While in Africa rag progresses to puppets and dolls – because the professionally made ones are not available or cannot be afforded, in Asia (Japan, South Korea, China), playing with puppets and dolls is raised to a pedagogical concept combined with learning effects.

In the **USA** puppets and dolls (as other articles for children) are standardised and made “secure” because of so many abstruse cases of liability.

In **Australia** puppets and dolls are extremely different because they come from different cultural sources, but they are overwhelmed by Americanised products from China.

In **South America** children from poor families have an advantage over those from the rich families, because the cheap imported plastic dolls with language and movement which can only be listened to and looked at, are broken very soon and then they are used in the traditional way if ever.

There are different ways to judge “good” and “bad” puppets. I want to judge puppets and dolls to show how strongly they support the emotional development of children.

In the **former socialist countries of the Soviet Union**, traditional culture – very often because of tourism – had a high reputation. This had – I think – a positive effect on the design of puppets and dolls.

In **Western Europe** traditional puppets and dolls have been turned into luxury items and collectables – I want to remind you of Käthe Kruse dolls and Steiff animals – and no family with a normal income can afford that. Products of China, licensed in America, were put onto the European market, but the quality was so bad that the Americanisation of toys could only start after standards of quality were introduced and expensive advertising initiated.

In **North America** puppets and dolls are get-and-throw-away products, which have to be replaced immediately if only the battery is empty. The Media have made a long-lasting identification with ONE puppet or doll, with ONE Teddy, ONE cuddly animal, suspect. The adults are the target group of the manufacturers and all advertising is done for them. Advertising suggests to adults that they cannot be sure always to do the right thing in educating their children. Advertising supports uncertainty and guilt. This guilt is fundamental in influencing parents.

Of course I can only describe my personal impressions gathered in many countries while working with teachers and other people related to children. With this background I want to point out: for playing with dolls and with puppets in groups – e.g. in schools – the philosophy or ideology of education is different in different countries.

a) Communist ideology preferred given and unquestioned standards of quality, which had to be visible to others. There was competition but the comparable results were much more important. In the late Soviet republics this ideology is still working.

b) Capitalist ideology on one hand supports hard competition but on the other hand individuality and outstanding creativity and teamwork are wanted, supported and asked for.

c) In countries where there are tremendous differences between the poor and the rich, the ideology is split:

- The rich develop a culture of delegating – in playing also. Small children are allowed to have their dolls and cuddly animals but the older they get the more they are forced to watch – without being active – how others are playing. This playing is very near to theatre or watching TV.

- The poor must cultivate their culture of “having not”, that means they have to take what they have or can acquire. These children have to be very creative in order to survive on an emotional as well as every other level. That means: only those who are as creative and healthy as possible will survive.

d) In the Confucian ideology of education in Asia, playing is subordinate to achievement. Pedagogically precious plays with learning effects, a perfect performance and the appreciation of people in higher positions (male, older family members, teachers etc.) are measures of a successful play – e.g. a woman who gives birth to a disabled child feels that it is a defect of her own. For her it is not possible to accept that the child needs to play without obviously successful results. In South Korea therefore disabled children are very often marooned.

In Asia (Japan, S. Korea, China) the development of emotionally mature behaviour can only be rudimentary or does not exist. Perfection in puppetry you can meet in many Asian performances – above all in China.

In Asia puppet therapy is seen as indecent because emotions are set free and are shown. This is a breaking of taboo which makes it nearly impossible to spread puppet therapy there.

Worldwide puppetry for children is somewhere between laissez-faire and absolute perfectionism. My impression is, that countries in which children are more free to play with puppets and dolls and are given more possibilities to mature emotionally with puppet play, have greater creative potential which later can be activated in works of science. Worldwide there is a trend in education towards learning by rote. If children play they lose track of time and society doesn't like this.

### **3. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TELEVISION, PUPPETRY AND THE EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN**

Many children sit in front of the TV daily for more than 6 hours and look, mostly aimlessly, at what TV has to offer: short sections of thought-out lives, music and dance, documentation and news. All these shows are trimmed to be quick, short and intense. None of the sequences

is longer than 20 seconds (you can count this!). Most of them are between 2 and 12 sec. Because of the speed of the presentation you cannot decide consciously if you want this information or not. Most of the information has a content of fear, aggression and emotional domination which is mostly underlined with music. This information with its emotional potential is taken in through the eyes – we can absorb no more than 20 to 24 pictures per sec – into our subconscious, where the feeling of being taken over by something and not being sure by what, is settled. With every exciting scene we get a small adrenalin shock. Because adrenalin is an addictive drug, looking at TV gets people addicted to adrenalin. It is NOT TV that makes us addicted but the small adrenalin shock that is given through the dramaturgical tricks of TV.

In puppetry the speed of TV is not possible because it is a live event and humans have a human speed and not a technical one. A puppet play shows processes – as they are in the play of children with dolls – which we can follow easily. This gives the audience the ability to add information out of their own fantasy and their own life experience to complete the story which is seen. With this a puppet play – unlike TV – is a genuine school of education and emotions. The little and very often abstract information on the puppet stage (puppets are only THINGS and not real life!), has to be added to by the spectator's own life experience. If not, the puppet play will stay as a far-away and incomprehensible picture and needs pedagogical preparation.

In other words:

TV shows fragments at high speed which are not digestible by the recipient's brain. Most of the films have many mini problems which are not, or insufficiently, solved at the end. In documentaries the original sounds are not heard, but music instead; water-, rock-, meadow- and forest-music etc. Music has an emotional content which can be measured and therefore it is already an interpretation of what the spectator sees. An individualised interpretation is no longer possible. This is a high grade of manipulation.

The story of a puppet play shows emotional processes which can be understood, interpreted and judged. Depending on life experience and ability, the audience can reconstruct these processes. Or the spectators feel or articulate different concepts of what they see. Puppet

plays stimulate acting experiments. They only illustrate reality and always have a place for alternatives.

Emotional development is easier to support by looking at a puppet play than by watching a Video or a TV show.

#### **4. SPECIAL CHILDREN – SPECIAL NEEDS**

Disabled children need special attention. But remember: every child needs attention! Children interpret the world through the adults, because they depend on them. Therefore my opinion is that there is only a gradual difference between disabled and able-bodied children. Of course children with special disability have to be supported specially. It would be stupid to think a deaf child could understand us if we were to speak long and very loud to it.

Puppetry has a quality that no other medium shows: puppets are catalysts of communication. Even if a person is traumatised and cannot speak about what he/she went through and cannot trust in an other person, a puppet will make communication possible. In therapy, patients show us their problems in the first 45 minutes, through puppets. But mostly, many months will pass until they carefully try out how to solve their problems.

Normal demands on disabled people are mostly too much for them. They love puppets and dolls because puppets and dolls answer on a level they can understand. Puppets do not threaten anyone – only if they are played by thoughtless adults who force solutions of problems, or abuse puppets for pedagogical purpose. Puppets only answer what the disabled can stand. There are remarkable descriptions of how children, youngsters and adults after a catastrophe could laugh during a puppet show or when making puppets and playing their own show.

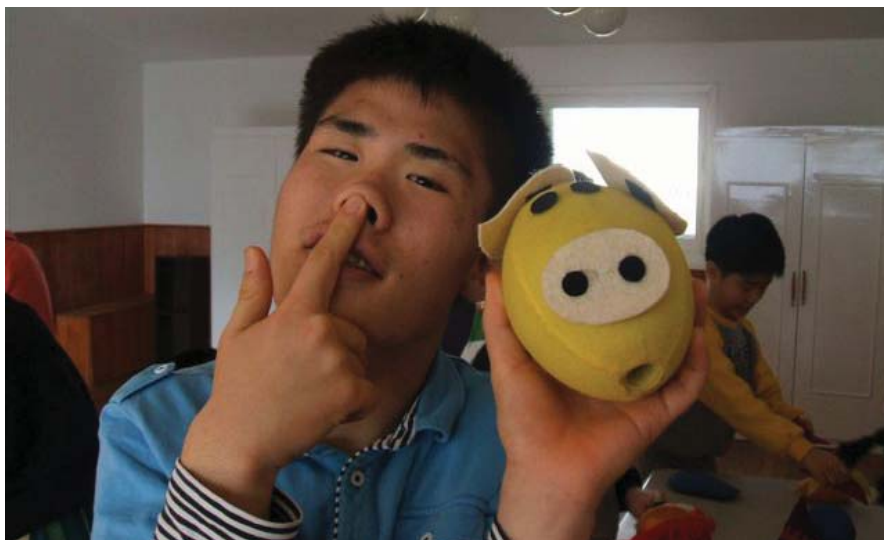
Puppets and dolls are incomplete. They do not have a personality which can be overwhelming, demanding or judging. They do not have a history of life and are waiting for the one we create with them. They only live if we give them life. To all therapists, teachers and parents they are superior. They support communication on every intellectual level. They stay neutral when others make demands and ask for results.

They never ask for more attention, but they ask us to act socially and emotionally. They make processes of learning possible that are not possible in other circumstances. They have a special language which everyone can understand. They have only expressions we project onto them. They always understand us. They laugh and cry with us, they let us complain and only contradict when we let them, and they carry us over emotional abysses. This phenomenon is independent of culture, age, ability to speak and life experience, intelligence and creativity.

## 5. PERSPECTIVES

About 20 years ago I worked in the USA. One of the puppeteers said: "Every child should go through a puppet stage!" Maybe. What I want to point out is that puppetry is one of the most diverse tools for communication and expression of emotions. It does not depend on the language, or manual dexterity, or intellectual competence of the participants. It is working FOR people's emotional health in both cases: both when they are doing puppetry themselves, and when they are watching a good puppet show.

It is a wonderful tool for therapy, education and special needs.



*Handicapped boy in South Korea with a puppet, 2010.*

# BIOGRAPHIES OF THE AUTHORS

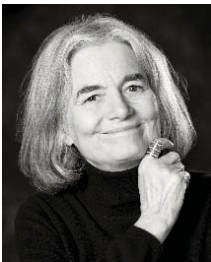
## Edi MAJARON, Slovenia



Puppet-director and musician-cellist. Finishing studies in Ljubljana he continued with postgraduate studies of cello and puppetry at AMU Prague. He has directed over 85 shows for professional puppet theatres in Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Poland, Byelorussia, Italy... His direction of texts, from Aristophanes and Shakespeare right up to contemporary authors, for adults and for children, is recognised for the way it engages a contemporary audience, using different

kinds of puppets, as opposed to live actors with a metaphorical function. Most of these productions have been presented at important international festivals. In 1988 he founded the International Festival LUTKE in Ljubljana. He taught puppetry at the University of Ljubljana, and the Academy of Arts in Osijek from 1991 to 2009. He leads workshops for primary school teachers, promoting arts in education as the most important didactic principle. He writes articles on the Aesthetics and History of Puppetry and on the Inclusion of the Puppets in Schooling, which are printed in periodicals and books.

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She worked as a primary school teacher for several years. During this time she looked for different creative ways to use puppets and drama as a teaching tool, and as a learning medium. She now teaches Puppetry and Drama as a senior lecturer at the Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana. She leads puppetry and creative drama workshops for primary school and preschool teachers in Slovenia and abroad. In 2004 she attained a Master's degree on the subject of "Symbolic play with puppets – a method of communication in the class" at the Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana. Her bibliography lists several scientific, professional, and conference articles, focusing on the use of puppets and drama in education, and the influence of puppet play on children's development. She is working on a doctoral dissertation focusing on "The role of puppets in social relationships". She is a corresponding member of the international UNIMA Puppets in Education, Development and Therapy Commission and a member of European Affective Education Network.

### **Livija KROFLIN, Ph.D., Croatia**



Graduated in Comparative Literature and English Language and earned her Master's with a thesis on Puppetry (*The Puppet Theatre in Zagreb 1945 - 1985*). She worked at the International Culture Centre in Zagreb as artistic director of the PIF (the International Puppet Theatre Festival) and as director of the Centre. Since 2007, she has been employed at the Dept. of Dramatic Art at the Academy of Arts in Osi-

jek, where she heads up the Puppetry Programme and lectures on the history and aesthetics of puppetry. She has written a book and a host of articles on puppetry and has edited a series of books on the subject. She is an international councillor of UNIMA, Secretary General of the Croatian Centre of UNIMA, member of the UNIMA Executive Committee and President of the UNIMA Puppets in Education, Development and Therapy Commission. In 2012, she earned her Ph.D. with the doctoral thesis "The International Puppet Theatre Festival (the PIF) 1968-2007 in the Context of European Puppetry".

### Cariad ASTLES, United Kingdom



Works at the Central School of Speech and Drama as Lecturer in Puppet Theatre. She is also the director of CROPP: the Centre for Research into Objects and Puppets in Performance and is an international councillor for British UNIMA. She trained in theatre at Exeter and London Universities and later as a puppeteer with the Little Angel Theatre and Travesura Theatre. She also performs and runs puppetry workshops with the inter-cultural group Irenia in Catalonia. Recent work includes directing puppetry for the Northcott Theatre's production of *Macbeth*, puppetry directing for Med Theatre and performances of *Adama's Journey* in Catalonia. She runs a series of puppetry and healthcare projects including work with pregnant women and people with dementia. She has research interests in visual theatre; traditional forms in contemporary theatre; carnival; puppet theatre for development; Latin American and Hispanic theatre. She has published several articles and chapters on puppet theatre and national identity, Cuban performance and puppetry training.

## Matt SMITH, United Kingdom



Currently works as Senior Lecturer in Applied Theatre at The University of Portsmouth, UK. Matt is currently a PHD student at Royal Holloway University. Previously he led the undergraduate Community Drama programme at the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, Liverpool, UK. He is also the artistic director for PickleHerring Theatre Company. Matt was a freelance artist for sixteen years, working in diverse settings such as schools, prisons, hospitals, environmental agencies, and with the homeless. Matt's work is always eclectic, working across disciplines such as drama, puppetry, masks, and music. Matt completed his MA in Contemporary Arts at Manchester Metropolitan University. Published papers: Smith, M. (2008), "PickleHerring and Marlsite projects: an interdisciplinary approach to junk music making", *International Journal of Community Music* 1:2, pp. 159-168; Smith, M. (2009), "Puppetry as Community Arts Practice", *Journal of Arts and Communities*, 1: 1, pp. 69-78.

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Director Nutmeg Puppet Company, Designer, Maker, Performer, Workshop Leader. 1971 M.A. Social Anthropology, Cambridge University. 1986 Laban Guild Recreational Dance Leader. Has worked in educational theatre, dance, film animation and puppetry since 1975 and made presentations at conferences in Hungary, Romania, Slovenia, France, and the UK. 1979 Set up Nutmeg – since when has made 43 original puppet productions for people of all ages. 1985 – 2006 Commissioned to produce and tour puppet shows annually to the general public and schools, about the ecology and social history of the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads (National Park). 1995 – 1999 "Ecopuppets" project with Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve and Broads Authority. Runs workshops for all ages and abilities in all kinds of settings. 2000 - 2011: Chair British UNIMA, Councillor

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