

# Applied Puppetry in Education, Development, and Therapy: Theory and Practice



**APPLIED PUPPETRY IN EDUCATION, DEVELOPMENT, AND THERAPY:  
THEORY AND PRACTICE**

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# APPLIED PUPPETRY IN EDUCATION, DEVELOPMENT, AND THERAPY: THEORY AND PRACTICE

Editor

Livija Kroflin

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Meg Amsden



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## From reviews

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This piece fills the gap in the literature on applied puppetry: the scientific foundation and practice of using puppets in up-bringing, education and therapy. Various authors, from many countries of Europe, and North and South America, throw light on the question from many different angles. These are research studies, both scientific and professional, founded on practice.

The book presents different and new approaches to the use of puppets in up-bringing, education, social work and therapy. It is a significant contribution to the study of applied puppetry, of a research and theoretical nature, with a firm basis in practice. It includes the previously unpublished results of scientific research and case studies. It is aimed at students and teaching staff at humanities and teaching faculties, art academies and medical faculties; scientists and practitioners of applied theatre and puppetry (drama educators, teachers, pre-school teachers, psychologists, social workers and therapists).

This book is up-to-date, necessary and will fill an enormous gap in the literature on applied theatre and puppetry.

Prof. Edvard Majaron,  
Faculty of Education,  
University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

The use of puppets in the educational and therapeutic context is an important topic. Their potential is varied and great, as shown by everyday practice. But since there is not just one possible mode of use, but an extremely wide range of possibilities, it is important to describe and comment, and also research different practices, which is precisely the focus of this book. Contemporary educational and therapeutic, but also artistic, practice constantly examines new possibilities of approach and inclusion of participants in a more personal way, which makes the main subject of this book extremely current, and its potential range significant.

Puppets and puppetry have been present for decades in educational and therapeutic practice, whilst a professional and scientific description of and research into the phenomenon have been lacking, which has slowed the development of the practice. In that sense, it is important to present recent thought, experience and research. The book in question does this in the best possible way, because it gathers together experts from many countries, that is, from very different educational, cultural and artistic traditions, where it is clear that a general consensus has been reached on the fundamental standpoint: the use of puppets in educational and therapeutic contexts is very important, and offers enormous potential.

The book gathers together experts in different areas who work in significantly different contexts, and with significantly different fundamental intentions (from raising the quality of life in homes for the aged and infirm, through treatment of collective trauma, to typical therapeutic and structured forms of work). If we also add the different social contexts, the tremendous effort invested in presenting the variety of ways of thinking and practice may be seen. We should also add the fact that all the contributions are written in a serious and professional manner.

The combination of practice founded on professional studies, and scientific research founded on practice contributes in the best possible way to our understanding of the phenomenon, at the same time encouraging further research and the development of practice.

Iva Gruić, PhD,  
Faculty of Teacher Education,  
University of Zagreb, Croatia

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## Preface

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The miracle of the puppet never ceases to surprise us with its inexplicable power. A puppet is so gentle and fragile, but so powerful! We marvel and wonder, artists and scientists research this phenomenon, academics try to explain it, and practitioners use it in practice on a wide scale. The UNIMA *Puppets in Education, Development and Therapy Commission* has joined the effort to research the phenomenon of puppets, whilst at the same time giving examples of the successful use of puppets in three fields: education, development and therapy. People are writing more and more about the use of puppets in places and for purposes beyond the theatre, but there is still a strong need for good quality texts, scientific and professional articles, and practitioners are constantly calling for and waiting with gratitude for examples from practice which will give them fresh ideas for their work in the field.

The EDT commission has so far published two books, whose titles clearly indicate their faith in the power of puppets (*The Puppet – What a Miracle!* and *The Power of the Puppet*), which can be downloaded in several languages from the UNIMA International website (<https://www.unima.org/en/commission/education-development-and-therapy/>).

In the desire to be even more open and more accessible to all those interested around the world, we are publishing our first e-book. I am grateful to all the authors who have selflessly given their texts for no fee, and to all those who have worked tirelessly so that this book can see the light of day.

Since we dealt more with education in our first two books, the emphasis now is on therapy, without, however, neglecting education and development. That is why its title is *Applied Puppetry in Education, Development, and Therapy: Theory and Practice*. It is, therefore, about the use of puppets outside the theatre, about puppets who do not appear before an audience in a theatrical performance in an exclusively artistic role, but in the many roles they are given in other areas of human life.

The concept of applied puppetry itself is dealt with in the first article in the book, written by **Matt Smith** (*Applied Puppetry – Provisional*

*Principles and Practices*), who explains the meaning, development and use of that term.

The second article begins with an universal research question, in the article by **Livija Kroflin**, *The Differences between Animation in Applied Puppetry and Puppetry as an Art Form*. She deals with the differences between applied puppetry and puppetry as an art form, with particular reference to animation, emphasizing the fact that there is an important difference in approach between puppetry in terms of artistic theatre puppets, and applied puppetry, but that neither of them is more or less valuable.

This is followed by articles on the use of puppets in education. The article by **Juliet Lockhart** *Why Puppets?* talks about work with an atypical population of children, describing work in institutions for children who have been expelled from “normal” schools.

**Michael J. Vetere III and Mary T. Vetere** deal with the education of teachers, examining the influence of work with puppets during studies, on the basis of their experience of their own creative capacities (*Teacher Candidates in the Age of Arts Integration: How Puppetry Can Inspire Creativity*).

**Matteo Corbucci's** article *Playing the game of theatre together: the use of puppets in social inclusion activities* tells of a successful, linked activity using the puppet as a pedagogical and artistic tool, during a series of socio-cultural activities carried out throughout Italy, in the context of amateur theatre.

The use of puppets is normal in work with children, but this book includes several interesting articles which show how puppets are used successfully in work with adults too. The article by **Meg Amsden**, *The value of practical experience when working with elders and puppets over 30 years*, takes an important and interesting step forward in that context: it describes work with residents of homes for the elderly and infirm, giving very constructive and applicable recommendations.

Several articles deal with the use of puppets in various types of therapy. *Puppet Therapy in Penitentiary Institutions of Russia* by **Larisa Telnova** explains how to approach adolescents and adults in penal institutions.

**Marialena Tsiamoura** researches how puppets function as a therapeutic tool. The puppet is linked with some theatrical characteristics, which, either on stage or during therapy, make it therapeutic, according to the

author of the article, *Searching for the Characteristics of the Theatrical Puppet during Therapy*.

**Åsa Viklund** writes about a study conducted on a world level (*Puppets in Psychotherapy – an international web-based study among clinicians*). The aim of the study was to understand more about how puppets are used among therapists today, and also to examine how they can be a useful tool in psychotherapy in the future.

Some of the articles express the author's own experience, often describing the work process, which will be immediately useful for interested readers in expanding their own understanding of the possibilities of this form of work. A typical example is the article, *A Psychodynamic Approach to Puppet Play*, in which the author **Eleanor Irwin** explains the importance of both form and content in analysis and understanding of play situations in the therapeutic context, offering an abundance of suggestions and recommendations for work.

**Karrie Marshall's** article, *Puppetry and the Art of Therapeutic Connection in Dementia Care*, shares good practice in therapeutic puppetry for adults experiencing cognitive changes affecting memory, communication, and cognitive functions. The author aims to clarify how puppetry can stimulate and connect with adults living with different forms of dementia.

**Svetlana Smirnova's** article, *Metaphorical Dolls in a Psychological Correction and Psychotherapy*, presents the theoretical and practical aspects of work with a metaphorical image of a doll at art-therapy sessions.

**Antje Wegener** talks about a specific situation involving the use of puppets in Germany, their presence, spread, and advantages and difficulties (*Practical Links to Art and Sciences – Therapeutic Puppetry in Germany*).

An impressive example is given in the article, *Puppet Therapy and Traumatic Memory in Post-dictatorship Chile*, by **Andrea Markovits**, who describes a series of workshops with adults, entitled "Puppets and Memory", devised to prompt people to talk about their personal trauma, the inexpressible, in order to halt the transfer of trauma from the older to the younger generation, and ease the enormous social trauma of a difficult period.

The authors **Tatiana Pushkareva and Darya Agaltsova** present a method of work based on Gestalt psychology, which, according to them, could be extremely useful to students of teaching and social-pedagogy (*A*

*Social-cultural Project “My doll and me” – Combined Educational, Psychological and Art Technology).*

The article, *From Ludic to Therapeutic: the Experience of Three Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder with the Art of Puppetry*, by three authors (**Roberto Ferreira da Silva, Aparecida Oliveira da Silva and Ana Paula da Silva Freitas**) is in fact a report based on the experience of the use of puppetry in the therapeutic treatment of three children with autism. Throughout the sessions the children carried out a series of activities to stimulate creativity, focus and self-confidence, impacting their behaviour.

These sixteen articles were written by authors from various parts of the world (Europe, South and North America), and ten countries: Brazil, Chile, Croatia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Russia, Sweden, U.K., and the U.S.A.). Their social, professional and personal backgrounds differ, and their approaches to the subject are also varied. Precisely this variety is the particular value of this book, as well as the fact that all the writers agree about their fundamental standpoint regarding the importance and applicability of puppets in education, development and therapy.

The book is intended for all those who are interested in the use of puppets outside the theatre: scientists, pre-school and school teachers, drama teachers, psychologists, pedagogues, psycho-therapists, speech therapists, social workers, students preparing for these professions and their teachers, but also theatre artists working in applied theatre. We believe that they will all find in it encouragement and inspiration for further work, in which their main partner will be that miraculous item with a soul, the puppet.

Livija Kroflin  
 President of the UNIMA Education,  
 Development & Therapy Commission  
[www.unima.org/education](http://www.unima.org/education)

Matt Smith  
**Applied Puppetry – Principles and Practices**

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*Review paper*

**Abstract:** This positioning document presents how the author sees the development of the term applied puppetry. The intention is for the proposed principles to be taken as points of departure for practitioners and scholars from which to consider the possibilities of applied puppetry. It further attempts to define the idea of applied puppetry which is a more widespread term to describe educational and therapeutic practices. The list of aphorisms are intended to provoke as much as to provide a mapping of a field.

**Key words:** applied puppetry, object oriented ontology, bridges, augmenting

The idea of applied puppetry has been around for quite a while. The establishment of the educational puppetry association in the British context in 1943 is evidence of this. During the war the EPA presented a very hopeful vision for puppetry with a social purpose. We could be inspired by the spirit of this organisation today. The idea of puppetry as a social educational force was clear, even during those dark days. Much later in 1992 the position of puppetry in the UK was surveyed by Allen, Ellis and Shaw and they noted that

Almost three quarters of the companies surveyed work in schools and more than half in community centres; performances and workshops in residential homes and institutions are common, and a handful of puppeteers work with the health service. For some puppeteers, a performance or workshop in a school is no more than a useful source of income; for others it is a conscious choice to work in education. Similarly, for some teachers, the puppeteers are no more than entertainers; for others, they are professional artists contributing to the educational process (Allen, Shaw and Ellis, 1992, 43).

This view of UK puppetry demonstrates a shift from the idealism of the EPA's vision for puppetry. My hope would be that applied puppeteers today are committed to the idea of puppetry as a social educational form and not just a handy secondary income.

I began my practice at the time of the *On the Brink of Belonging* publication and my work emerged in this context before the contemporary situation of puppetry as a mainstream artform in the UK. My position in regards to the shifts in puppetry I see as embodying the coming together of both applied theatre and puppetry since 1992.

Since training to be a puppeteer at Central School of Speech and Drama I wandered through lots of work that was applied. Through contexts like youth theatres, playschemes, street theatre, care homes, youth clubs, prisons, probation, special needs groups, museums, galleries, health networks, environmental projects and education from pre-school to masters students and in these contexts I have participated in and witnessed the potential of the puppet. I became known as "Matt the Puppet Man" through my work as a freelance artist and through my company, Pickleherring. I

am now, an academic looking back on all this practice, trying to make sense of it and also looking forward to further mapping the terrain of applied puppetry. Much of my work explores the haptic and ludic pleasure of applied puppetry through workshops, research, residencies, lectures and performances.



Bear and Elephant Boy from *The Generosity of Penguins* by Lavinia Murray, Pickleherring touring show. 1996. Photograph Mike Wight.

For the last ten years I have been advocating for the adoption of applied puppetry as a term to encapsulate the myriad of practices involving puppetry when it is used for community art, educational contexts and therapy. I am following the lead of the major contribution in the field of scholarship in applied theatre (Nicholson, 2014 and Thompson, 2003) and the way that applied theatre is recognised as an umbrella term. I have presented this term as worthy of adoption in both the context of European conferences and in the USA and met with some suspicion and hostility about using a term that can be considered broad and difficult to define. By adopting applied puppetry the intention was not to homogenise the rich landscape of puppetry used with specific purpose in relation to specific communities. The intention was to align puppetry towards developments



in wider theatre cultures and the great deal of both practical and theoretical knowledge in applied theatre. It also relates to my positionality as a practitioner who has combined applied theatre and puppetry professionally as practitioner and later in my career as scholar. It is clear that in the last ten years some very interesting developments have changed the map of puppetry and this has had an effect on applied puppetry. For example the major shift in the UK context has been the success of the puppet show *War Horse* and its positive effect on the fortunes of The National Theatre. It is now one of my many anecdotes that this puppet show financially saved jobs and the National Theatre's fortunes.<sup>1</sup> More importantly this show changed the idea of puppetry as an artform in British theatre cultures, for when I first toured adult puppetry at the beginning of the 90s I found venues reluctant to take the risk and now this is not the case. The next key change is in the theoretical landscape, for example in philosophies of things and objects found in new materialism (Brown, 2009), vibrant matter (Bennett, 2009) and Object Oriented Ontology (Harman, 2010). This has played out over the last ten years and I suggest that these key challenges to the way we think about ontology as not centred on the human subject are the theoretical backbone of how to look into the practice of puppetry in general, but more specifically applied puppetry. This body of thought has challenged me to think differently about both the puppet as something that has even more wonder and mystery as a performing object, but also how I think about human participants in my practice amongst the networks of objects I need to consider in applied puppetry.

I am encouraged that UNIMA is now adopting the term applied puppetry because this useful combination of words has helped me to both define, but also question what I consider a very vibrant and dynamic set of practices globally. Debating the usefulness of such terminology should also be part of its future as otherwise ossification in practice and thinking will develop. For the rest of this paper I will explore and present some of the pertinent and relevant aspects of applied puppetry from my scholarly explorations. But before we move on I would like to offer this thought;

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1 <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2011/oct/03/war-horse-national-theatre-success>  
War Horse covers National Theatre's lost Arts Council grants 2011, Brown, Mark.

with all the different types of groups I have worked with in communities, I have found that they always appreciate and like to adopt a name they choose for themselves. So naming your practice is tricky.

I am arguing that applied puppetry involves an increased awareness of objects in networks. This awareness tries to avoid instrumentalism and instead includes attending to the mysteries of both the human and non-human in practice. This relates to a phrase I am playing with at the moment, as a way of understanding the whole ensemble in theatre, which includes the “non-human ensemble”. To explore this world of the non-human ensemble, I suggest, for applied puppetry a set of new principles and a re-visioning of practice. This is a provisional list and is always in transition and grows in reaction to the learning from new networks of objects, including the ideas of participants. By flattening the ontologies of my practice in this way it does not devalue the human in my work, as that would be ridiculous. Instead, the impossible challenge is, through cathexis, to pay more attention to everything in the space and imagine the subjective in all objects or things. To make this set of principles I am suggesting palatable and useful, I present them as a set of aphorisms inspired by the great visionary Peter Schumann from Bread and Puppet Theater.

### **Ethics of the “hand to hand”**

Responding to philosopher Emanuel Levinas and his idea of the “face to face” moment in ethics I have characterised puppetry in workshops as a space in which the face to face is deferred to the haptic space of the hand to hand. This deferment of the responsibility to the others “being” from the face to the hands makes some exchanges in workshops less intense and challenging for participants. When we focus on hand based activities we find different ways of exchanging between ourselves. This can allow for surprising conversations, confessions and discussions. The notion of hand to hand ethics in applied practice could be developed both in community context and around theories of how object based performances position bodies and identities.

### How we listen to both objects and subjects in applied theatre

Listening centred practices as advocated by Suzi Gablik (1991) seem relevant to the way that puppetry can be applied to group settings. Listening to the people, space, objects and discourse without privileging one element is a demanding aim for the practitioner, but an approach that appears to be a way of opening up experiences, rather than delivering didactic learning exercises.



Bunny made from Scrap materials 2003, PickleHerring Theatre.  
Photograph Jonathon Purcell.

### Puppetry and objects as bridges

Thinking about the way that puppets and objects help us bridge the void through community based arts practice has lots of examples<sup>2</sup> and

<sup>2</sup> Welfare State International, In The Heart of the Beast – <https://hobt.org/> and the work of Karim Dakroub and his company Khayal, Lebanon [www.khayal.org](http://www.khayal.org) are good examples of companies and projects that use puppets and performing objects as bridges.

seems to be a way of discussing the puppet's role in practice. The puppet can provide a bridge when intersubjective dialogue is difficult due to language barriers or different consciousness's meeting within a creative space.

### **The witness and the warrior – puppets as weapons and puppets as conduits**

I have briefly looked at the history of puppetry for purpose and recognised a clear distinction between direct and dialogical approaches (Smith 2015). The dogmatic use of puppets through stereotypical identities can be used to mock and attack tyrants, but it can also powerfully (mis)represent others in cultural exchange. More unusually the puppet can become a very interesting trace of cultural exchange and even as a witness to many spaces, some at the extremes of human society, I am thinking here of Gary Friedman's South African Prison puppetry project (Blumberg 2001).

### **Learning from litanies – networks, objects and things**

Drawing from Ian Bogost's *Alien Phenomenology* (2012) it is apparent that if practitioners are more aware of the network of objects in the space then this provokes us to develop litanies of objects in our practice. Chair, light, desk, child, clock, clothing, scissors, paper, adult, glue, posters, mobile phone, string... By paying attention to the objects in this way we re-evaluate what the dynamics are in the space of practice. Through the contemplation of objects separately in this way new knowledge can be formed. This knowledge drawn from consideration of objects can help the puppeteer working in engaged contexts understand the complex world of practice and workshop spaces. In applied puppetry the litany of objects and subjects could be considered, not just the puppet's role.

### **Puppetry as disruptive – activating dissensus (Rancière, 2010)**

Puppets can create fissures in experience due to their unstable status as objects and these spaces are exciting and transgressive. Within this gap in the sensible, politics and art can combine in surprising ways. For example

when police appropriate and destroy puppets.<sup>3</sup> This space for the political puppet is also well documented in the work of Bread and Puppet Theater (Brecht 1988).

### **Objects and things augment applied practices**

This augmentation can include puppets but also involves the panoply of objects in the space of practice. These are sometimes now in the realm of digital augmentation.<sup>4</sup> This can also happen in an embodied way in the work of Emma Fisher and Laura Purcell-Gates through their exploration of puppetry and disability (2017).

### **Beyond the metaphors**

By exploring how groups pull the strings and own the means of production puppets can be much more than metaphors for human freedom. As John Gray (2015) argues puppets can be a positive model for human freedom. The key seems to be to allow the groups in communities the autonomy to find their own metaphors and ways of working with puppetry. Puppets as objects, have lots more to say about the complexity of experience and power than the cliché of the controlled individual. In my experience when groups pull the strings and change the means of production this process creates interesting narratives and counter-narratives.

### **Plato's Cave as a community puppetry workshop**

This playful mind game takes the pejorative idea of the shadow performance for the chained bodies in the cave and turns this on its head. If the chains were removed, would the people in the cave still want to perform a shadow theatre for themselves, during the cold nights?

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3 ON THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF GIANT PUPPETS: broken windows, imaginary jars of urine, and the cosmological role of the police in American culture. By David Graeber, 2009. <https://libcom.org/files/puppets.pdf>

4 Example of real time digital puppetry: <https://vimeo.com/325707868?fbclid=IwAR1PVzfHNT-AcssJ9Qr28X4CvSYRDk0FuZObYqGa1p3eHsbyR0m8G-V0up4>

## **The dangers and safety of the puppet in practice**

One aspect of puppetry that I have understood through practice is that these figures are not benign and can be received as uncanny beings. Puppets as uncanny figures can disturb and alienate some people due to associations with the inanimate brought to life and connection to the supernatural. Disturbing associations have to be taken account of if we are to work responsibly with puppets especially with people whose conditions we are not familiar with. Assumptions that puppets are good for autistic people have to be challenged and thought about more thoroughly. Melissa Trimmingham (2010) and her work in this area indicates a deeper understanding of how to approach using puppetry in a safe manner with autistic individuals. Creating a safe space to explore the boundaries of what can be achieved with applied puppetry is certainly always required.

## **What is left when we put the puppets down? Change and difference and the responsibility of “performance remains”<sup>5</sup>**

After the life of the performance the puppet figure or the artefact from the performance can remain. This means that these traces continue the performance beyond the space of the live act into other spaces and temporalities. This is exemplified by the great artist William Kentridge whose beautiful objects begin before the stage production and live on in alternative lives after the show. This example of performance remains was demonstrated by his installations at the White Chapel exhibition, particularly his performing screen automaton which was part of the process of his staging of the opera *Lulu*.<sup>6</sup> This significance of the performance remains is pronounced in applied puppetry and means that communities can still be represented through the objects they create beyond the workshop or performance. This is particularly the case with groups that are transient or vulnerable to displacement and there are many projects now with refugee and migrant groups whose puppets bear witness to the issue of global immigration.<sup>7</sup>

5 Rebecca Schneider, 2001

6 <https://www.whitechapelgallery.org/exhibitions/william-kentridge/>

7 Stories in Transit project in Italy is using puppetry as a part of its activities working

### **New genealogies**

To understand new principals it is often important to rethink the past looking in particular into interventions with puppets in the past. Some of this historical practice shows some alarming qualities when looked at from a twenty first century perspective. My suggestion is that we can use this history as a heuristic in relation to how to think about best practice. A historical view could certainly start from animism to animateur, but with a critical lens and not just by appropriating the idea of the shaman or other attractive culturally specific ideas. The term animateur was adopted as a role for community artists in the UK until its meaning was critically questioned. How can one take the patronising position to animate a community or group?

### **Bending reality is not always a positive experience with puppets – the tears of the veteran at the “shadow of war” puppet show**

Many years ago I made shadow puppets with children from a primary school representing soldier figures, machines of war, then the graves of the dead. These simple images processed across the screen to a simple soundtrack. The teacher I collaborated with decided to restage the show at a local old people’s home and a veteran of war was moved to tears. I was not present but the fact that the old man had been re-traumatised by a very rudimentary and simply formed shadow puppet performance impressed upon me the potential for affect in community based puppetry. Performed images by children can open up old wounds.

### **Responsibility with performing objects**

The affective power of puppetry has lots of examples. This can also be combined with the distancing effect that puppetry can produce. Empathy and distance can be combined in applied theatre in a socially responsible practice that can open a space where ideas and feelings can be discussed,

not always with words. This is only sustainable with the application of care and responsibility by the puppeteer practitioner.

**There is nothing wrong with materialism:<sup>8</sup> socially positive views of the object in everyday life and performance**

The accumulation of human ecological waste is one of the most important issues facing society and puppets can comment on this catastrophe. Plastic fish made from waste plastic are great creatures that speak about the absurd Anthropocene. Puppets made from waste implicitly provoke us to think differently about our lives. Materialism is not inherently wrong, in the way anthropologist Daniel Miller presents this, when he suggests objects help us to form and solidify identities (2015). It is just that we need to think of alternatives to how we produce objects out of materials like plastic and maybe objects can help us think differently about the ecology.

**Puppets do create change in practice**

This change can be recognised through reflecting about what happened in workshops and performances in communities. My advice is to be careful about deciding what that change may be before consultation with the groups involved. Puppets can be very effective purveyors of dogma and promote important messages that can be life changing. The difference is in how the bodies of the community are either acted upon or acted with in applied puppetry. This awareness could help transformative agendas in being more balanced and responsive to groups. How we listen to both objects and subjects in applied theatre, seems to be a central point about how to approach the problem of ethics and the politics of privileging thingness.

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8 Miller, 2015



**The puppet as sibling and collaboration:  
how I learnt to love Humphrey the puppet**

Puppets are not just tools to be used in practice but important actors in the social space of practice. This I have learnt through years of workshops, shows and thinking. I now feel that puppets are my kin and have developed new knowledge. I would not have completed my thesis without my collaboration with Humphrey and countless other puppets. This kinship with objects is also in response to the “object turn” in contemporary thought and philosophy.



Humphrey, the brother in practice 1998. Author's own photograph.

**The unknown journeys of objects through communities**

My puppets have a separate journey and life to mine and one that I can only imaginatively speculate about. Recently my daughter borrowed some

of my recycled plastic fish puppets for a climate change demonstration by schoolchildren. I was not there but the puppets were and they were very present and active at the demonstration. This is part of the power of the puppet. Socially positive views of the object in everyday life and performance allow us to view how object and things shape us and our identities. The unknown journeys of objects through communities and how they augment community also seem pertinent to the future study of applied puppetry.

### **How do objects enable community conversations?**

Puppetry and objects perform as bridges, not just filling the void or gap between us but providing a bridge from which to explore alterity and problems. The transgressive puppet bridge can be a place on which to stand and look at new viewpoints, not just a device to get to the other side. This idea of practice enabling community conversations – bridging the void with light, shadows and fire – has historical examples like Welfare State International who were pioneers and visionaries of bridging the void with performing objects.<sup>9</sup>

### **Cathexis and practice**

Applied puppetry practice is noticing, listening and paying attention to both the other and the thing within the space of creativity. I often suggest to students to let the objects do the work in the space and the objects can facilitate and encourage some great things to happen. Objects are great enablers in all kinds of creativity; the instrument in music making, the blank page for the drawing, the beat for the dancer. Artists invested in objects and thingness are employing cathexis in practice, applied practice could further develop this intense concentration and noticing, both of the other and the thing.

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9 <http://www.welfare-state.org/>

## Anarchy of the puppet

Within all this attention paid towards the incommensurable otherness of the performing object, we mustn't forget the beautiful anarchy inherent in the puppet experience. The puppet does not follow any recognisable form of human power or even respect human power. Puppets often comically mock human follies and limitations. As John Gray (2015) suggests the puppet is freer than the human.

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Dr Matt Smith, Senior Lecturer  
 University of Portsmouth  
 White Swan Building  
 White Swan Road  
 Portsmouth  
 PO1 2GA  
 U.K.  
 matt.smith@port.ac.uk

Dr Matt Smith currently works as Senior Lecturer in Applied Theatre at The University of Portsmouth, UK. Matt's work is always eclectic, working across disciplines such as drama, puppetry, masks, and music. Artistic Director for PickleHerring. He has been using puppetry, masks and junk music for twenty three years in diverse settings such as schools, prisons, hospitals, environmental agencies, and with the homeless. Through this practice, he adopted a relational non-therapeutic approach to workshops in which sensitive respect for the individual's autonomy was tantamount. As part of his practice based scholarship Matt has produced articles about applied puppetry and looked at the problems of puppetry in community settings and its limitations, for example in the article *Puppetry as Community Arts Practice* (2009). A few years after this article he wrote a short polemical paper *The Politics of Applied Puppetry* (2012) in which he suggested that the radical potential of applied puppetry was found in the workshop as opposed to the performance. In one of his latest articles *The Practice of Applied Puppetry: Antecedents and Tropes* (2015) he describes three problematic antecedent tropes of applied puppetry and avoiding these negative tropes he presents as one of the aims of applied puppetry. Matt is concerned with how a critical view of applied puppetry could explore power, both in the puppets themselves and in the networks of participatory practices.

Livija Kroflin  
**The Differences between Animation in Applied  
Puppetry and Puppetry as an Art Form**

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*Original scientific paper*

**Abstract:** This text deals with the differences between applied puppetry and puppetry as an art form, with particular reference to animation. Animation is a key concept in puppet theatre. There is an important difference between, on the one hand, animation in religious rites and children's games, and on the other in puppet theatre as an art form. The first approach may be termed a "performer-centred" and the second an "audience-centred" approach. In children's games and the worship of cult figures the puppets are animated only by the belief of the child or the believer that the puppets or dolls are alive, regardless of their mobility or static state. They are characterised by the absence or complete neglect of any audience. Professional puppet theatre is completely audience centred and its only task is to establish complete communication with the audience, to communicate to it an idea and the emotion of the work being performed. In education and therapy both principles are encountered, depending on the situation and the desired goal. When a performance is not intended for an audience, the performer may behave towards the puppet as he or she desires. But as soon as an audience is involved, the performance must respect at least the minimum laws of the theatre and puppetry, in order to communicate with the public.

**Key words:** puppet theatre, applied puppetry, animation, performer-centred approach, audience-centred approach

Puppets are not only found in theatres. Indeed, they travelled a long road before they appeared there. We find them in religious rites, children's games, education, therapy, puppet theatres and other areas of life. With all their similarities, the use of puppets varies in each of these areas. In this article, I will point out differences in the forms of animation that exist, on the one hand in rites and children's games, and on the other in puppet theatre as an art form. In education and therapy both principles are encountered, depending on the situation and the desired goal.

The assertion made by historians, that the roots of puppet theatre lie in rites and rituals, seems very convincing. According to that theory, puppets evolved from motionless idols, becoming ritual statues then cult puppets, who were given movement (initially by carrying the statue from one place to another, and then giving the possibility of moving individual parts of the body), and in this way the process of their transformation into real puppets was complete (Magnin, 1981; Jurkowski, 1996).

Other writers, such as Charles Nodier, support the theory that puppets developed from children's toys (Baty and Chavance, 1959). In essence, both these apparently conflicting concepts of the origins of puppets conceal a shared idea, which is the idea of animation, that is, the existence of life in inanimate matter. It is probable that all puppeteers are animists to some extent, and perhaps that is something that is shared by all human beings. Wendy Passmore-Godfrey put it like this: "Our human inclination is to animate objects around us, whether we put words in our dog's mouth or kick the tyre when the car has broken down on the side of the road" (Passmore-Godfrey, 2005, 174).

For puppet theatre the concept of "animation" is key. "Animation, or the imbuing of the object with life, is the essential factor of the puppet" (Jurkowski, 1996, 21-22). Unless puppets are animated, they are just interesting ornaments. The ability to be brought to life, where it seems they have life inside them, must be built in, even as they are being created. In the theatre the animators do not for a moment leave the puppets without life, without a "soul", without their "anima" that is, without themselves and their life-giving power. Today, when puppets take on various forms, some writers even prefer the expression "animation theatre" rather than "puppet theatre" (Hamre, 2002, 2012).

But let us consider children playing. They will put a doll down to sleep and leave it in bed, without the need to show the blanket rising and falling evenly because the doll is “breathing”. There is no one there that they need to show that to in any case. In children’s games, there is no audience. A child will sit a doll at a table and leave it there to “eat”. And it will “eat”. Perhaps it will not even move, but the child knows it is eating. Perhaps the child will only bring a spoon up to its mouth, but will know that no one is feeding it, but it is “eating by itself”. The child’s energy fills the game and the dolls are “alive” even in moments when they are motionless and when no one is holding them in their arms.

In a child’s game, as is the case with cult figures, puppets or dolls are only brought to life by the belief of the child or the believer that the doll is alive, that it has life in itself. This does not need to be understood literally because “scholars do not believe that the mistaking of fiction for reality is ever complete, even at a primitive level” (Jurkowski, 1996, 22).

Something that is common to both worship and children’s games is the lack of an audience. Nothing is done for anyone else, for the sake of anyone else, or so that anyone else would see it.

In the theatre, in contrast, everything is done only and exclusively for the audience.

When Wendy Passmore-Godfrey says that “a puppet, static on a shelf doesn’t have power – a person is always required to provide the spark of spirit that moves through the puppet to the viewers” (Passmore-Godfrey, 2005, 174), this is perfectly true when related to play in front of an audience. In everyday life a puppet or a doll on a shelf may truly be merely a static figure, without life in itself, it may serve as decoration or have been forgotten and “dead”. Or something else is also possible: perhaps a child may have set it up on the highest shelf they could reach because he or she is playing a game of hide and seek with the doll, looking for a specific book, climbing or looking at the surroundings from a height, and in that case the doll is very much alive.

In professional theatre, puppets must be thought through and planned from the very early stages right up to their encounter with an audience. It is important to choose appropriate materials (where artistic reasons should be the only valid reason, and not ease of availability or the low price of materials), the type of puppet (a small, quick glove puppet, a magnificent



marionette or a dreamy shadow) and its aesthetics, a text that is appropriate for the age, social or other audience group, and to develop the dramatic composition to communicate the main idea of the piece as well as possible. The scenery, music, lighting and all the elements of the set must be harmonised. The animation must be flawless, in terms of the movement, voice and appearance of the puppet. In the theatre, a puppet is laid aside and without an animator the puppet is dead.

Solo puppeteers have devised various ways of overcoming that problem since they only have two hands. In traditional puppet shows, such as Punch and Judy, there are only two characters in view at the same time. If a third character appears, which is not animated, it is either dead, pretending to be dead, or the other two characters take it in a ring, between themselves, and they dance together, so all three characters are brought to life by the energy of the dance. In contemporary puppetry, puppeteers sometimes appear in the role of a great manipulator, who creates his or her own world, who brings it to life or takes its life away at will. In some of his productions, Neville Tranter (who is always the only person on the stage, playing one role as a living actor and all the other roles in turn as puppets) emphasises the theatrical character of the performance, its distance from real life. He takes the puppets, plays with them, then sets them aside so they wait quietly for their turn. Some puppeteers however use puppetry and build a mechanism into the puppet to make it live even when it is not in the hands of the puppeteer (e.g. it creates the movements of breathing). In telling a story using table-top puppets, the puppeteer moves the puppet, which is active at a specific moment, whilst all the others stand still like ornaments. If he or she is successful in this, all the puppets will be alive the entire time, because the energy of the story-telling and the story itself will give them life. But sometimes puppeteers fail to do this and it is clear that it is a solo performance merely because they were unable to afford partners, so the puppets sometimes appear “dead” on the stage. In professional theatre this is inexcusable, especially because it may create dramatic misunderstandings.

These two principles may be called performer-centred and audience-centred approaches. They are at opposite ends of the spectrum. In therapy and education, as has already been said, both principles are found, but under different conditions.

Matthew Bernier talks about client directed puppet play (Bernier, 2005):

It involves the client making or selecting puppets for spontaneous puppet play. The client takes on the roles of scriptwriter, actor/puppeteer, and director. The therapist is engaged by the client to assist in the puppet play by taking on roles according to the client's direction (Bernier, 2005, 110).

In therapy it is important for the client (child or adult) to express themselves in their own way, to express what is deep inside them, and not to think consciously about the effect their performance will have on someone else. It is important for them to be what they are, and not to play a role. Role-playing in therapy, incidentally, also serves for the client/performer to show what they really are, so the therapist is able to react.

In the theatre no one will employ an actor with a speech defect. Even if actors use a stammer in creating their characters, they have to use that characteristic sparingly and carefully, so it does not become tiresome. But they certainly will not introduce a stammer to a character who has to be sure of himself, resolute and important. In pre-school, school and therapy, a child may stammer even when his or her character is someone who is decisive and self-confident. Perhaps the child will even stop stammering as he or she does this, which would be a great success.

In puppet therapy, the therapy acts on the client, the performer. A theatrical performance does not have the primary purpose of having a therapeutic effect, although it is possible for it to have a therapeutic effect on the audience. It is possible for it to be therapeutic for the performers too, but this should not be felt.

Here is an example from practice. Puppetry students in their second year of their MA (so their fifth year of studies, as mature puppeteers) agreed on the subject of their final examination. Most of them chose the topic of death, which they wanted to approach in various ways. For one student this was traumatic at first and she was reluctant to agree, since she had experienced painful deaths in her own life. She agreed in the end and preparing for the examination had a healing effect for her. During the work, however, she insisted that one scene must be accompanied by a song that her recently deceased mother particularly liked. Her tutors'

insistence that that song was not appropriate for the scene did not help. In the end they let her do what she wanted, understanding her situation. At the performance the audience sensed that the song, however beautiful it was, simply did not fit. Something like that should not be allowed in professional theatre. In this example, the students and professors assessed that in the end it was more important to allow the performance to have a healing effect on the student.

Some kindergartens have what they call a “puppet corner”. They are equipped with various types of puppets, and usually some form of puppet theatre. The children can play in it as they like and wish, and do what they like with the puppets. This is a performer-centred approach. But if the child wants to show something to another child or the teacher, if a performance is being prepared for the parents, or if the teacher wants to perform something for the children, the basic rules of theatre apply, albeit greatly simplified.

In school there are two basic types of activity using puppets. A puppet workshop may be an independent form or result in a puppet show, or work with a puppet may be introduced into regular lessons as an occasional or regular activity, whether a few days are given to working with puppets (which may but does not necessarily result in a puppet show), or where part of each day is devoted to puppets.

Judith O’Hare is aware that “puppetry in education is very different from puppetry in theatre” and therefore:

It is important to distinguish between puppet theatre and puppets as a form of creative dramatics, not for the perfection of the performance, but for the growth and development of the child/puppeteer. When the goal is either creating theatre, recreating original stories or stories from literature, or making a statement on the human condition, the puppeteer works for perfection in: manipulation, staging, technical theatre, and overall aesthetic and artistic presentation of the theatrical piece. When the goal is education, the puppets become a vehicle for expression of the child’s understanding of life, literature, social studies, etc. Puppets become foremost a vehicle for communication and personal interaction through

child drama, and the theatrical performance becomes secondary (O'Hare, 2005, 64).

Some teachers seem to be afraid of puppets, they do not trust them, or they do not trust themselves being able to use them. Others again think that it would be nice to "play with puppets" a little, but they do not have time for it, because the curriculum demands they cover the "important things".

Introducing puppets into lessons, however, does not necessarily require a great deal of time nor any special puppeteering talent. Puppets may be introduced as a teaching aid, for all subjects, not only those where we might expect a connection with the theatre (languages, literature, history), but subjects such as biology, physics, chemistry, technical studies... Nowadays, especially in more prosperous countries, schools have various forms of projectors, smart boards and various digital aids. But however attractive, smart and interactive they are, they cannot completely replace an encounter with a three-dimensional presence in the room and the children's satisfaction when they recognize puppets as the "relatives" of their favourite toys back home. Teachers can prepare the simplest puppets themselves or the pupils can do so during a lesson, very quickly and simply. For example, when learning the alphabet, the letters could be made into characters by giving them movement and a specific personality. One letter may be lively and jolly, another bad-tempered, a third happy to be found in most words, a fourth jumps from pupil to pupil whose names begin with that letter, a fifth is self-satisfied to be able to stand alone and mean something by itself, such as "I" in English, or a sixth is sociable and wants to get together with other letters to make words together. In the same way in mathematics or geometry the characters can become dramatic characters. In geography a river (which may be a simple scarf that gets narrower and wider) tells the class where it flows and how it changes as it goes along: how fast it flows, the cold mountain stream, the fish that live in it, and then how it receives various tributaries into its flow (other pupils come up to it, holding other scarves), how it spreads out, becoming more peaceful in the valleys, how boats sail on it... In history lessons the characters need not only be kings and queens, soldiers or serfs, but also important charters, beautifully decorated as charters are, which talk about why they are important and what they brought to the world. A new document

might eat up an old one, and so show very vividly how the old document ceased to be valid; the new document might then suddenly increase in size. All these things are not just objects, not just props, because they are given a personality too. The possibilities are endless.

In performances like these (note well: they are not well-prepared dramatic performances, the preparation consists of choosing objects from everyday life or simply creating a character, perhaps merely by cutting up a piece of paper; the text is actually the subject matter the pupils need to learn anyway) some of the pupils will really enter into the role of the river, the charter or the letters, they might change their voice for instance, whilst others may not. That does not matter. It is not a performance, but the puppet is merely a teaching aid.

In these situations no particular animation skills are necessary. In preparing puppet shows, however, when a performance before an audience is expected, it is necessary to invest a great deal of time and effort into mastering at least acceptable animation skills.

George Latshaw describes this clearly using the example of glove (hand) puppets:

Instinctively, we use our hands and fingers in certain ways regardless of the covering, be it gloves, mittens, bandages, or hand puppets. Watch young children with hand puppets, and note the speed with which the puppet action moves to pushing, hitting, and pinching. The hands inside these puppets are still acting as hands, doing the things that children do with their hands – push, hit, and pinch. The puppet is simply another covering, a glorified boxing glove, until adults put a stop to it (Latshaw, 2000, 55).

When a performance is not intended for an audience, the performer may behave towards the puppet as he or she desires. In school, which is not only an educational establishment but also a place where children are nurtured, the way they treat the puppets will help the teacher understand the pupils' personalities, which will be a valuable guide in the process of education and nurture in the days to come. Only if work continues on the drama that began as a sketch used as a teaching aid to learn specific subject matter, is it possible to work on corrections in the puppetry.

This relationship to puppets and animation is particularly important in therapy. Precisely in the authentic relationship to the puppet or doll, and in the relationships between the doll and other dolls, the therapist will be able to diagnose problems and help the client. For this reason, amongst other things, it is recommended to make puppets on which the child could take out his or her aggression, using it as a punch bag.

Puppets are particularly appropriate when dealing with sensitive and taboo subjects in teaching literature in older classes, and even with adults. Taboos are encountered in all societies. In some there are many of them, in others fewer. In some they are very strict and may not be touched on, in others efforts are being made to de-taboo some topics. In all societies there are certain sensitive subjects which pupils will encounter in their lives, and they do not know how to talk about them or how to deal with them. These subjects are, for example: death, terminal illness, suicide, homosexuality, incest, rape, domestic violence, peer violence, safe sex, sexual inhibitions and attitudes, racism, neo-Nazism, and many others.

Puppets enable pupils to express emotions

that they may not otherwise dare articulate because, in their experience, it is not “the done thing”. [...] Sometimes, as the result of an excessively strict or coercive education, there are things children or young people are not able to exteriorise. Consequently, in some cases we see a puppet beating its father, shouting that it hates school, or sobbing that its mother does not love it (Debouny, 2002, 75).

Puppets have this ability thanks to the depersonalisation effect, as Cariad Astles puts it: “Puppets, although they may represent characters, are not human; there is always therefore an element of depersonalisation or distance in their use” (Astles, 2012, 67).

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. [...] 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 (Astles, 2012, 68).

In such situations: "the puppet provides the child a kind of cover, behind which he/she can hide" (Majaron, 2002, 61) and using puppets "enables people to suggest that the conversations are not coming from within themselves, but from an outside source which is out of their control" (Astles, 2012, 67).

Children who are very shy need to conceal themselves even more. As a result they will not "act", they will not want to speak with the "puppet's voice", perhaps they will not even animate the puppet. They will use it as a sign that what they are saying has nothing to do with them, especially if they are expressing thoughts, emotions or desires which they hold deeply but are ashamed of, or the situation requires them to express attitudes that are not their own, but they are needed for dealing with different attitudes in a dramatic conflict. In these situations they should not be required to take on a role and to "act". If they hide their faces completely, that is OK. If they do not look at the puppet at all, that is OK. If they speak in a voice that is completely unsuitable for the puppet in question, that is perfectly OK. In this way they will send an even stronger signal, showing their distancing. An almost Brechtian effect will result, where the performer will re-tell what the puppet said, as though speaking in the third person (and perhaps they will speak in the third person), and although at the same time they are holding the puppet, it will serve as a double shield.

It is a completely different situation in a puppet group, as an independent free activity, which results in a puppet show.

There are many skills that children need in order to use puppets as a means of expression. When children are introduced to puppets in the classroom, they see them out of the theatrical world, without lights, sound, and theatrical settings. I start with a bare slate: the children assisted by the teacher and me create the puppets, story, characters, setting, music, and even the theatre. They go through the same

process that a professional puppeteer does, only they have to learn all the steps (O'Hare, 2005, 65).

Children will perhaps respect certain theatrical laws as do professional puppeteers, although their performance will not be (because it cannot be) marked by the same quality of the puppets, the animation, dramatic composition or other elements.

In a children's puppet show

the process is more important than the product. Putting all the steps together is essential. The artistic quality of the product will reflect the age, developmental level, and accumulated experiences of the children presenting the play. In working with puppets and drama with children the most important element is the growth of the child (O'Hare, 2005, 67).

Children find greater satisfaction in making the puppets and the set, thinking up the dialogue and the plot, than in rehearsing the performance. When they have come up with all the ideas, numerous rehearsals become boring and tiresome. It is true that meticulous animation is only achieved after many years of work. Moreover, animating a puppet is not in any way a "natural" process. Children lift their hands by simply lifting them up, without thinking about the muscles they need to use to do so. They walk simply by walking, not thinking about how walking is placing one foot in front of the other, maintaining balance and so on. A puppet's arm, however, is raised by lifting one finger, whilst the others have to remain motionless, or by moving one string, or perhaps a stick. They will learn to make puppets walk differently depending on whether they are glove puppets, marionettes or rod puppets. And they will certainly walk differently than humans. How far the children will be persistent and successful in this depends on many factors. The most important thing is keeping in mind the goal that the puppet project is meant to achieve.

In planning a puppet project with children there must be a clearly defined goal. The goal could be to present a wonderful piece of theatre or the goal could be to use puppets to improvise a story from literature or a scene from history, or develop voluntary language, or work cooperatively to create a story or act out a scene, or practice writing skills, or construct



an original puppet from a variety of materials, or illustrate what has been learned by restating it through the drama of puppets, etc. (O'Hare, 2005, 64).

Attaining perfection should be left to the professionals. But in the case of a performance before an audience, however, it is necessary to respect at least the minimum puppet theatre rules, so the audience is able to understand what is happening. The minimum is truly enough: to move the puppet that is speaking and, if a screen is being used, to take care that the puppets are not "buried up to their eyeballs" or "jiggling drunkenly about". It is necessary for the leader to know the laws of puppet theatre (the aesthetics and technology of puppets, dramatic composition and animation), but this is not required of children. At least not at first, until they ask to learn more.

To conclude:

We have talked about two basic approaches to performing with puppets: one could be called the "performer-centred" and the other the "audience-centred approach". In children's games and worship of cult figures, dolls or puppets are brought to life by the relationship of the child or believer to them: they treat the puppet or doll as if it were alive, regardless of its static nature. The same principle is at work in therapy procedures or in a pre-school group, when the client or child is left to treat the doll however they wish, with no regard for the observer (if there is one). This is also the case in school, when a puppet is used as a teaching aid, as a means to achieve a goal, which is not a puppet show.

Professional puppet theatre is completely audience-centred and its only task is to establish complete communication with the audience, to communicate an idea to it and the emotion of the work being performed.

However, if a child wants to show his or her game with puppets to his or her parents, if the therapist performs for the client, or if children in kindergarten or school prepare a show for an audience, it is necessary to respect at least the minimum puppet theatre laws, so the audience will have a clear idea of what is being shown.

Therefore, in a child's game a chicken can have four legs, a fox can be purple, and a mouse bigger than an elephant. It is not important what the puppet looks like, but how the child feels about it. "If the child thinks it looks like a lion, then let us call it so!" (Hunt & Renfro, 1982, 19). But

in a performance before an audience a chicken with four legs would be a wonder of the world, a purple fox would be an eccentric character, and if the elephant is smaller than the mouse, that means the elephant is a coward, and the mouse brave, or there is some magic at work... Whatever the case, these examples are possible, but only if they are justified by the story line.

In applied puppetry there is no need for perfection in the animation, but in a performance for an audience, it is necessary to respect the basic principles of the clear communication of ideas: the puppets must be visible, it must be clear which puppet is speaking, and what the puppets are saying must be audible. Minimal animation is important, which will successfully convey the message of the performance, “make a statement”, whatever it is.

Professional puppet theatre is not in any way a “higher” form. Professional puppeteers can help educators a great deal, but just as educators have to learn about puppetry, so puppeteers have to have the special skills and training of educators if they want to use puppets in education. These two competences differ from each other but also complement one another well.

*Translated by Janet Tuškan*

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Livija Kroflin, PhD, Associate Professor  
 Akademija za umjetnost i kulturu u  
 Osijeku / The Academy of Arts and  
 Culture in Osijek  
 Kralja Petra Svačića 1/F  
 31000 Osijek  
 Croatia  
 livijakroflin@gmail.com

Photo: Ivan Špoljarec.

Livija Kroflin lives in Zagreb and works in Osijek. She graduated from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb in 1980 in Comparative Literature and English Language, and then attained her Master's Degree from the same faculty in 1987 (*The Puppet Theatre in Zagreb 1945–1985*) and her PhD in 2012 (*The International Puppet Theatre Festival (the PIF) 1968–2007 in the Context of European Puppetry*). She worked in the International Cultural Centre in Zagreb as the artistic director of PIF (the International Puppet Theatre Festival) and as the director of the Centre. Since 2007 she has been employed in the Department of Theatre Art of the Academy of Arts and Culture in Osijek, where she heads up the Puppetry Programme and lectures on the history and aesthetics of puppetry. She is the selector of the PIF productions and is the initiator and editor in chief of a series of books entitled “Lutkanija” and “Velika Lutkanija” at the International Cultural Centre. She has edited a number of books in the field of puppet theatre. She writes books and articles about puppetry, which she publishes in Croatia and abroad. In 1982 she founded the Puppet Company “Lutkobus”, which is still active today, and has written several puppet plays. She is an international councillor of UNIMA, a member of the UNIMA Executive Committee and President of the UNIMA Puppets in Education, Development and Therapy Commission. She has taken part in many international puppetry conferences all over the world (Prague, Budapest, Subotica, Ljubljana, Moscow, Jakarta, Beijing...).

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## Juliet Lockhart Why Puppets?

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*Review paper*

**Abstract:** This article deals with the making of puppets to extend the non-verbal language of 7-14 year olds who had been excluded from mainstream education in a Pupil Referral Unit in Suffolk, UK. In the article the author discusses the value of creating and taking ownership of a puppet that represents an aspect of self. The article describes an example of a practical artist-led project in an educational setting. The practice based investigation described in this article took place at a Pupil Referral Unit. The unit catered for the needs of up to 12 young people aged between 7-14 years, who had been excluded from mainstream education. The article argues the case that when the focus of the project was the creation of the puppet the pupils were able to express themselves and communicate their story with positive benefits.

**Key words:** creative process, education, child, communication through art, education



## Background

“Why puppets?” A fourteen year old boy asked me this question during the fourth session of my project on making puppets in a pupil referral unit. It was near the end of a two hour session that was very full on. I felt mentally exhausted at that point and my mind went blank. I couldn’t find the words to describe to that boy why I felt so strongly about the power of the puppet. How to condense so many thoughts and feelings into a few sentences to answer those two words “Why puppets?”

From the very outset, I knew I wanted to make puppets; there has always been a longing to make figures whether they were the soft toys and dolls I made incessantly as a child, to the sculptural figures I now create. One of my strongest memories of childhood was that for a birthday I had asked for the game *Buckaroo*. It consisted of a lurid plastic donkey that came with a set of brightly coloured accessories; buckets, pick axes, ropes etc. The object of the game was to load these objects one by one onto the patient donkey until at some point the distribution of weight would cause the donkey to lower his head, raise his backside and kick his back legs into the air, thus rejecting all the paraphernalia. I wanted, not the game, but that donkey that seemed to come to life, and who had movement quite unconnected to human hands taking hold of various limbs and arranging them.

So what is it about puppets? Why are some of us drawn to them and why is it that some people find them so threatening and intimidating?

I can no more reason why I felt such a powerful longing for that little plastic donkey, the excitement I felt when I thought about it, than others can verbalise their negative feelings for puppets. I have asked people what it is about puppets that frighten them and so far, have had no real insight into this conundrum. A teacher with whom I was discussing puppets said that like clowns, another source of fear for her, it was the lack of facial expression. She could not read their faces. However expressive their body language was, their faces remained a blank mask.

In a conversation with Ernst Gombrich, the artist Anthony Gormley remarks:

The basis of our whole relationship to the world, as babies or toddlers, is that we make no distinction between animated

and inanimate things. They all speak to us; they all have a kind of character or voice (Mitchell, 2000, 9).

I wonder if, for some people, the thought that most things might have this trait, then the possibility of them “coming to life”, might be one of the most frightening things imaginable. Indeed, many horror films and books have taken that idea as a starting point.

In an interview with Joseph Krofta, conducted by Hannah Kodicek (1992) for a BBC documentary on Czech puppetry, Krofta spoke of the animation of an object:

We need to remind ourselves that the word “to animate” does not mean “to make move,” but rather it means “to give soul to,” from the Latin word, anima... to breath soul into an object, does not mean making a perfect copy of it... An artist makes us believe that any object he touches is alive, and ‘ensouled’, that is, it contains a living soul (Bernier, 2005, 7).

This notion of the “soul” crops up time and time again in connection with puppets. There is something intensely magical about being able to bring to life an inanimate object. The power of being able to articulate that which cannot be spoken.

Bruce Chessé in his essay, *Creativity and the Talented and Untalented Child as it relates to the art of Puppetry*, states:

Puppets stand alone as magical images. They evolved out of religious and mystical ceremonies because, like a magic trick, they are illusory in nature.

When manipulated they take on an individuality all of their own and are accepted as distinct personalities and as such are highly prized by their makers (Bernier, 2005, 14).

Do we have complete control over what we make or at its inception does an object begin to take on a life of its own? Does it “speak” to us? Salley Vickers the author of *Miss Garnet’s Angel* and *The Other Side of You* talks about the characters in her books:

It is a very common error to suppose that authors are reproducing their own thoughts and feelings via their characters. Any author worth his or her salt will allow their characters to choose what they think and feel. If things are going right, the character arrives and they tell you how they think

and feel, if you know how to listen and pay attention to them, that is (Vickers, 2007, 4).

In the same way when I have begun to model a puppet's head, even if I start with an image in my head, very often during the process of crumpling, moulding, manipulating plain newsprint paper and then binding and wrapping it with masking tape, means that a shape will often emerge that then dictates the character of the puppet. As I work on this process adding paper here and there, twisting and taping, indenting and forming I discover who or what is emerging and it can be unexpected, a complete turn about from my original idea.

Is it a sense of the deep rooted feelings, memories and all else that resides in our unconscious, being dragged up and reformed when a puppet comes into being? Although we can build a pre-determined structure where does the "story" come from?

Set against photographs of Anthony Gormley's figures the artist has chosen text taken from part of St Augustine's confessions from 400 AD:

When I turn to memory, I ask it to bring forth what I want: and some things are produced immediately, some take longer as if they had to be brought out from some more secret place of storage; some pour out in a heap, and while we are actually wanting and looking for something quite different, they hurl themselves upon us in masses as though to say: "May it not be we that you want?" (Mitchell, 2000, 108).

Reading these words and seeing images of Gormley's figures; arms outstretched, or curled like embryos, or lying still on a concrete floor, and pictures of shadows washed in watercolour across a page, brought to mind the first puppet I had made.

Looking back through my journal I found my thoughts on the making of this first puppet – a life size marionette of myself.

When I think back so many of my memories took place as I lay in my bed watching the outside world. I charted the changing seasons; the trees as they clothed themselves and then disrobed as the cold winds started to blow. I had planted a climbing rose against a fence and from my window I could see it growing year by year. The long stems reaching

out enclosing the fence, sometimes I thought it was as though they could reach out and enclose me too.

I know that at that time I was reading a book about a piano tuner who had been sent deep into the Burmese jungle to tune a grand piano at the whim of a colonial commander sometime during the last century. I do not know what it was that convinced me I needed to make a puppet. It came to me suddenly as I lay there watching a bird seek shelter in amongst the thorns. As is the case with so many notions it is the coming together of strands – some thick and solid, some so fine they are barely there, that seem to float about inside my head seemingly at random, but all the while they are weaving themselves together to form some sort of sense.

I made a puppet – life size and cast from my own face, hands and feet. Right from the beginning she would be dressed in a long white nightdress. Barefooted with strings. I never deviated from that first vision. I documented the whole process and while doing so it became clear that the making process became the work.

Maybe the reason I feel the making was so paramount is that I find the finished work uneasy to look at. It doesn't sit right and I wonder if this is because I feel that with more time I could have produced something better or whether, as I actually suspect – so much was realised through the making. I am still not sure what I was trying to say – I know it was about control – but I am not sure whose. I still do not know if she is victim or survivor.

I have felt since that I needed to let go and somehow destroy her. I wondered about hanging her in the garden. A figure motionless amongst the trees I wanted to see her slow decay. Someone suggested burning her and sending her ashes up into the universe, but that seemed too brutal. But, as yet she is wrapped in cloth and bundled without care in a corner. I do not want to see her again. I do not, if I am really truthful, (and I am uneasy about committing this to paper) like her. I want her gone. She is bound up with my past.

I feel that this story from my journal is an important one to tell. It is part of my story and shapes the way in which this project developed.

Taking the viewpoint of an art therapist Lani Gerity observes:

As an art therapist, I see the restorative value of the puppet making and the connected stories as many layered. The first layer lies in the actual puppet making, being on a deep pre-verbal level, a way for people to repair their body image, through art as therapy; through the creation of the whole body image representations where they once only created representations of dismemberment and dissociation (Bernier, 2005, 139).

I know that the journey from conception to completion of that puppet was a cathartic one for me. I also know that I have never wanted to verbalise or justify my reasons for making that journey. It was enough to create.

I do know that I feel an empathy with those that struggle to keep a foothold in a world where we are expected to conform to certain ways of doing things. Who struggle with the prescribed formula, who really need to be given alternatives, different means to express themselves.

From these words and this coming together of so many strands came the realisation of a project whose core was the creation of puppets.

There is much work done, much writing about and much knowledge on the use of puppets in education and therapy. This obviously draws upon the puppet in its performance capacity. Although some therapists and educators include the making of puppets in their use of them, many do not.

The first book I read about the use of puppets in education was *I Am The Story* by Caroline Astell-Burt. It is a book rich with ideas and information describing various ways to make different puppets, ways to work with them and examples of projects. It stresses the need for a “client centred” approach and explores ways of enabling people to tell their story.

However, in one chapter of *I Am The Story* Astell-Burt describes a “failed project” in which she stated that it had failed because she used puppet making as a way into puppetry. She felt she should have gone straight into theatrical and performance work and invested her time in making a set of puppets in advance. She went on say that puppet making has very little to do with puppet theatre other than being a way in

for those who are particularly stimulated by a craft activity. She asks the question “someone should make the puppets but who?” She argues that there has to be less emphasis on the making of the puppets. She advocates that by making puppets in advance all the emphasis is on the performance aspect.

When I first read this I did begin to doubt the role that I was to play in a project where the emphasis was actually on the making. This was my bit that was seen by some to have very little relevance and was being called into question. As I was working in an environment and with a partner whose main concern was the therapeutic aspect of puppets I did question whether the role of the artist was necessary. I was actually shocked by the idea that the making process was so casually dismissed. In fact I had read half the book before I came across this example but ultimately it provided the focus for my research.

### **The Project**

Initially I had many concerns about working in a pupil referral unit. I had had no previous experience of working in such an environment and alongside those concerns I also felt I had little in the way of my own life experience to relate to these children.

The unit where I have been working is small; only twelve pupils aged between 7 and 14 can be catered for usually attending for two terms. At this point in time all the pupils were boys. My first impressions on entering the buildings were of warmth, light and a strong sense of a nurturing environment.

Although the reason for my first visit was to take the role of observer, I found this impossible to do. The small classes of six to eight children allow for no non-participatory roles. The atmosphere in the classroom is very, very different from that of an ordinary school. The energy level coming from the children is very high and unstable, concentration levels are limited as is their ability to cope with situations. The children need constant attention and watching as situations can arise very quickly and without warning.

I felt very strongly that in order to be able to prepare for this project I would need to spend some considerable amount of time in the classroom

beforehand to have a better understanding of the way in which such a unit operates. On reflection I do feel that this was crucial, and an essential part of any project would be to allow time spent in observation.

The project took place over five weeks. Each group had one hour per week. We had decided to make two different kinds of puppets. Those pupils aged 7 to 11 were to make a simple marionette puppet, the 11 to 14 years old to make a rod puppet, both based on an aspect of themselves.

As well as making the puppets we decided to give each child at the beginning of the project a box with some art equipment in it and as a place to store work in progress. Our aim in doing this was to set the tone of the project as something “out of the ordinary” and special. Our hope was that the pupils would keep a record of ideas and progress. We asked them to sketch any ideas for puppets they might have. At first we had also discussed putting disposable cameras and a kit for making sock and finger puppets in the box. We then decided that it would be better to space out these “treats” so that the interest level would be kept high with the anticipation of what would happen next.

On the second and fourth weeks we introduced a new type of puppet, shadow and sock and there were accompanying materials to go with it. On the fifth week the camera was given to them. The idea behind the camera was to give the children a means to record the project as well as giving us additional material for documentation.

Although I had planned the sessions very meticulously, I felt it was equally important to allow the sessions to develop in whatever way the children indicated. So when I introduced the shadow puppets one boy decided not continue with his marionette puppet but instead began to write a play and design some shadow puppets to go with it. He chose another boy to help him and they spent time preparing the play and then performed it to the rest of the group.

I found this departure from the allocated task very exciting, I felt that he had responded to the idea of shadow puppets and the potential to combine other skills such as writing and performing. Bruce Chessé states:

The puppet itself is self-motivating in that it creates its own life as it is being built. It is an evolutionary process that on completion exists as a reminder of your successful and positive accomplishments. Secondarily, it involves social

skills that demand interaction from both performers and audience. It gives the timid or uncommunicative child the opportunity to express himself or herself through a middleman, the puppet. The aggressive child can find an acceptable outlet for aggressive behaviour by acting out concerns in puppet shows (Bernier, 2005, 15).

Once the rest of the group had watched the performance, it set a precedent for more performances. One of the boys in the group had severe problems with any aspect of performing. He would hide under tables in an attempt to withdraw from any attention. One of the strongest images I hold, whilst watching those self initiated performances, is that of this boy crouched on a table behind a makeshift screen, his head bowed in concentration as, with a couple of other boys, he took part in a play with a sock puppet he had made.



String puppet.

I had decided on making a very simple string puppet with the 7 to 11 age group. The idea came from an example given in *I Am The Story*. The



puppet consisted of a cardboard head and hands attached to a fabric rectangle which represented the body. The puppet was controlled by one set of strings attached to either side of the head and one set attached to each hand. I felt that this simple construction could be completed well within the time frame allocated and also within the capabilities of the group. I encouraged them to draw round their own hands in order to get a sense that the puppets were to be an extension of themselves however they interpreted that. I provided a cardboard template for the head as a starting point. A couple of boys asked me to draw their features on the faces so that they could paint them. One boy wanted to make a vampire puppet based on a character in a pantomime he had just seen. Another puppet became a “rock star”, another a “power ranger” character from a children’s TV series. They were encouraged to decorate the fabric “bodies” however they wished and beads, sequins, glitter, glue etc. were provided.



“Houseman” string puppet.

Matthew Bernier in his essay on *Psychopuppetry* advocates this idea of self representation:

In art therapy, the clients are engaged in their own puppet making and the puppets are then used in structured or spontaneous puppet play activities designed to meet specific therapeutic goals. Essential to this approach is the idea that puppets can be made as an extension or representation of the self, parts of self or aspects of others or of the environment (Bernier, 2005, 125).

We invited the boy who had such problems with performing to come and talk to us on his own about his puppet. He told us his puppet was called “Houseman” as he was made of bricks. The puppet could take his house with him whenever he wanted to go fishing. He told us that “Houseman” liked fishing as he “doesn’t have people in his ear the whole time”. Houseman had several characteristics that he shared with the boy such as the same age, love of fishing and need to be on his own. All the while he was talking to us he had in his hands a “fishing rod” fashioned from a piece of bamboo with some string attached. He demonstrated various ways of casting a line and told us stories about his fishing exploits. He explained that he really enjoyed making the puppets as he had “only ever done painting” at his previous school. “When you make a puppet you can make it anything you like. You have a choice of how you want it to look or how big you want it. By making yourself into a puppet you could be anything.”

The older group was given the challenge to make a rod puppet. This puppet consisted of a head made by modelling paper and securing with masking tape before covering with tissue paper and glue. The body frame was made up of lengths of bamboo and stiff cardboard tubes both of which needed to be measured, sawn and fixed with a hot glue gun. When it came to costuming the puppet I was unsure about letting the boys make costumes. I felt that with their lack of skills they might struggle and lose interest. At the point of actually constructing the puppets their level of engagement was really good so I decided to buy some ready made baby clothes to customise.

Some just dressed their puppet but one boy in particular went a step further and transformed his tee shirt into a multicoloured statement.

From the outset of the project I had been drawn to this boy. I do not know why it is that some children catch your attention from day one. I

note that in my journal I had taken time to write down my first impression of him in more detail than the others: He often looks worried, his brow is furrowed. His appearance is scruffy and he appears to be very self-conscious. The first time I met him he had a tracksuit top on, zipped up and a rucksack. He didn't remove these at all during the lesson. He is a big solid person, doesn't smile much. Determined though in a quiet way, it is obvious he knows what he wants to do and will get on and do it without discussing it. His hands shake a lot so it is physically difficult for him to actually make things.



Rod puppet.

I had not previously met this boy in the run up to the project. That first day I knew he wasn't particularly keen on coming to the art lesson; the fact he didn't remove his top or rucksack suggested that any minute he might take flight. I seemed to contradict his image of an artist: an individual who could not create without the influence of drugs. He seemed genuinely baffled that art could be simply the result of a person's imagination and that drugs had no place in the process.

That first day he struggled with the project. He found it difficult to understand what I wanted from them. However, by the end of that session his puppet began to really take shape.

From thereon in he came to each session knowing exactly what he wanted to do. He spent some time working out a combination of buttons for the eyes; his puppet had a red head and a purple cape. I was intrigued by his puppet. It stood out from the rest of the group's work by its very strangeness. It had a quizzical look about it and a familiarity that I could not place.

An important part of the project was the recognition that everyone has a story to tell and a right for that story to be listened to if so required.

The life told artlessly as to a friend, told some evening in a quiet room to reveal the truth without reserve, can be read like a dream, like a myth. For our telling, like the whole of our living, is governed by a personal myth kept hidden even from ourselves. And this myth, part of the very flesh, impelling us as by necessity, speaks in the special language of body and spirit, in stance and gesture, in images, symbols, and rhythms, elaborating the unknown themes of our life. The one who offers to hear our dream or our story opens a source of creative energy that brings us to the threshold of a secret power and magic, that puts us in touch with our own mystery (Rouse, 1978, 12).

Throughout the project we never asked any of the boys to bestow any characterisation upon their puppet. During a session if a suitable moment arose we might ask a few questions about the puppets but I felt it important not to push anyone to talk about their work unless they chose to do so.

I was very interested to talk to the boy and his strange puppet. We explained that we were doing some research into puppet making and hoped we would be able to repeat this project with other children at other schools and that we felt he had much to contribute. He told us about his puppet.

My name is Shadrach  
I am different  
I am scruffy but I don't care what people think of me  
I look around at the others in their white t-shirts and jeans and I look  
with pride at my purple cape and multicoloured t-shirt  
I want to be different  
I am imaginative and I can make people laugh  
If someone says something to me I just laugh at them and I walk away  
I am confident  
I can make a joke out of everything  
I live life to the full  
I am confident  
I am different.



"Shadrach" rod puppet.

In her essay on *Puppetry as a Therapeutic Medium*, Mickey Aronoff explains:

Puppets protect: what is expressed can be denied and blamed on the puppet, so that inner worlds are revealed in non-threatening ways. Puppets can do things and change things in ways people can't. This transformational quality is also what puppets offer to people: they can help people do things they can't do unaided in self-exploration, self-expression, and individual or social change. Puppets enable access – access to one's inner life, thought processes, creativity and social change; language is extended (Bernier, 2005, 122).



Shadrach and his maker.

It was obvious whilst talking to the boys afterwards that their puppets, in the making, had assumed names and characteristics. If nothing more is ever done with those puppets their identity is steadfast. Looking back to my own feelings about the cathartic nature of the making process of my puppet I feel that through these puppets the language of these children has also been extended.

### **Conclusion**

As an artist I am very taken with the making process so this aspect for me is dominant against the lesser, in my mind, performing aspect. However, more and more I can see the amazing possibilities in the act of enabling someone to create three dimensionally an aspect of themselves. For me this act of creation is a complete one in itself. Nothing more has to be done, said, justified, reasoned, whatever. I can see the added benefits of working in collaboration with actors, therapists, counsellors etc. but I feel that both using puppets and creating them can stand alone in isolation and have just as many positive effects.

Finally, I am left with an image in my head: a photograph taken of Shadrach sitting quietly in the shadow of his maker.

*All photographs are taken from the author's photographic archive.*

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Juliet Lockhart  
 Lockarts  
 Friday Lane Cottage  
 Church Lane  
 Hitcham  
 Suffolk IP7 7NN  
 U.K.  
[julietlockhart@gmail.com](mailto:julietlockhart@gmail.com)

Juliet Lockhart is an educator, writer and artist working predominately in fabric, paper and with found objects. She has a BA in Fine Art and an MA in Literature and Creative Writing. The focus of her work is story. She is interested in folk and fairy tales, the stories hidden beneath our landscape entwined with memory, history and happenings and the personal stories that shape us into who we are. She is the founder and artistic director of Lockarts – an arts in mental health organisation, delivering educative and therapeutic arts projects to people of all ages to improve and sustain their mental and emotional wellbeing. In 2006 she was involved in Eastfeast, an action research programme in Suffolk, UK. Eastfeast's aim was to demonstrate when artists and teachers work together in effective partnership, they can provide a learning experience which becomes an inspiration for life. Part of the programme placed an artist and teacher together to plan and deliver a practice-based investigation in an educational setting. This work led to the creation of The Puppet Project offering opportunities through the puppet making process to those who have little voice of their own or believe their voice has been taken from them, to rediscover it and develop a new language. The project has worked with adults who made puppets to show the world who they really were, children whose lives have been affected by cancer and young adults who made a film about how their mental health impacts on their lives.





Michael J. Vetere III

Mary T. Vetere

## Teacher Candidates in the Age of Arts Integration: How Puppetry Can Inspire Creativity

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*Original scientific paper*

**Abstract:** Teacher candidates are often faced with high demands to excel in content knowledge, pedagogy, and practice. These standards often diminish the teacher candidates' sense of creativity when it comes to developing lessons. Yet, when lessons are designed to be cross-curricular in nature and call upon the arts as a learning medium that teaches both the core subject as well as the art subject, the lesson is more engaging, thus developing higher achieving students. This study examined the views of teacher candidates' ideas of creative teaching when puppets were introduced as a medium to teach arts-rich cross-curricular subject matter. Participants engaged in a workshop, which exposed the individuals to creative puppet drama as a vehicle to teach through arts integration. Participants engaged with a survey about their views of creativity and puppetry as it related to creative teaching. They were also observed during the session. The researchers concluded that at the conclusion of the workshop, the individuals developed their sense of creativity, improved their sense of pride/accomplishment, and their overall sense of self-efficacy was improved.

**Key words:** arts integration, creativity, drama, puppetry, education, teacher preparation

## Introduction

Carl W. Buehner stated, “They may forget what you said, but they will never forget how you made them feel” (Evans, 1971, 244). Teaching is truly an art. Although teaching may be viewed as the transmission of knowledge, it goes far beyond. It is connecting, engaging, instructing, assessing, and reflecting with the students. Preparing teacher candidates to embrace this definition requires the student to think in an unconventional manner. Infusing the element of creativity within the philosophy of teaching and then filter down to the lesson requires a defined skill set that must be modeled by the master teacher and professor.

What is creativity? Can it be learned? Creativity has multiple meanings depending on the context. It is thinking in a different way. “What can education learn from the arts about the practice of education?” (Eisner, 2004). Eisner was concerned by the direction of education towards uniformity under the influence of accountability. He stated,

What we are now doing is creating an industrial culture in our schools, one whose values are brittle and whose conception of what’s important narrow. We flirt with payment by results, we pay practically no attention to the idea that engagement in school can and should provide intrinsic satisfactions, and we exacerbate the importance of extrinsic rewards by creating policies that encourage children to become point collectors. Achievement has triumphed over inquiry. I think our children deserve more (Eisner, 2004, 3).

Using creativity has surfaced as one of the tools used in teaching (Antonietti, Colombo & Pizzigrilli, 2011; Griffiths, 2014; Shaheen, 2010; Pink, 2016). Creativity fosters skills such as divergent thinking, flexibility, motivation, deepening understanding, and promoting joy in learning. Furthermore, Starko (2017) found that the strategies that support creativity (such as solving problems, exploring multiple options, and learning inquiry), also support depth of understanding. Therefore, there is a link between creativity and teaching.

Creativity is harvested in the use of the creative arts. Teaching with the arts, through the arts, and within the arts (Burton, Horowitz & Abelles, 2000) fosters both creativity and academic achievement. Teacher

preparation programs would best serve teacher candidates by preparing them to see the value of creativity and teaching using the creative arts.

## **Research**

This research project examined the role of creative puppet drama in teacher candidates' education as they prepare to become licensed creative educators. The researchers used the puppetry arts as a medium to teach both drama and visual arts, coupled with cross-curricular content to stimulate creativity. The aim of this research was to discover how puppetry affects how teacher candidates view their ability as creative future teachers.

### **Problem and aim of research**

In order to become an educator in early childhood, elementary, middle, and/or secondary schools, teacher candidates in the United States are often faced with successfully completing rigorous courses in curriculum, child/family development, inclusion/diversity, special education, and other courses across disciplines. Many teacher candidates are focused on their course-work, and are also faced with passing demanding additional benchmarks and state/national testing to assure they possess the knowledge, skills, and disposition to educate youth (Brown, 2018). Teacher candidates, who successfully pass their course work, complete and pass required tests, as well as finishing a practical experience in student teaching and becoming licensed educators, may still lack the fluidity and creative skills that are necessary for the classroom to make learning meaningful (Palaniappan, 2008).

The teacher-preparation curriculum consists of knowledge of content, pedagogy, and field experience. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) developed standards for the preparation of teachers of young children. The key elements of Standard 5 state:

5a: Understanding content knowledge and resources in academic disciplines: language and literacy; the arts – music, creative movement, dance, drama, visual arts; mathematics; science, physical activity, physical education, health and safety; and social studies.

5b: Knowing and using the central concepts, inquiry tools, and structures of content areas or academic disciplines (<https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/higher-ed/standards-summaries>).

These wide-ranging academic disciplines make it a challenge for educators to teach all subjects well. Not only do teacher candidates need to know the content knowledge but must be able to educate others on the subject matter. One way teachers can effectively teach these diverse subjects is through creative teaching. When teachers engage in creative teaching, student achievement increases (Schacter, Thum and Zifkin, 2006). Yet, creativity in the classroom varies and is often reliant on the teacher's perception of their creativity in the classroom (Freund and Holling, 2008; Rinkevich, 2011). Therefore, educating teacher candidates about how they can harness their creativity and enhance their pedagogy will in-turn foster student achievement.

## Creativity

Creativity is often challenging to describe. It is often abundant in the arts yet emerges in all areas of study and disciplines. For example, Paul Torrance, the father of creativity, defines it as, "...the process of sensing gaps or disturbing, missing elements; forming ideas or hypotheses concerning them; testing these hypotheses; and communicating the results, possibly modifying and retesting the hypotheses" (Torrance, 1962, 16). His work focused on fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration (Torrance, 1974). This definition crosses disciplines and is relevant in all vocations.

Graham Wallas also recognized the universal nature of creativity in all areas of problem solving. He identified four stages of the creative process in this theory *The Art of Thought*. This included: preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification (Wallas, 1926). Wallas' method of the creative process can be found in disciplines ranging from the arts to science to writing. In Ken Robinson's book, *Creative Schools*, he identifies creativity as "the process of having original ideas that have value" (Robinson, 2016, 118). All of these definitions reflect the universality of creativity and the cross-disciplinary connections that emerge.



However, in today's schools, creativity is often valued, yet not implemented. School systems, due to a high demand for accountability, may have suppressed creativity or creative teaching (Piske et al., 2016). This divergence of perceived value of creativity and the absence of creativity in schools was deemed the *creativity gap* (Makel, 2009). The creativity gap can be seen in schools across the United States. There are several posed explanations to this phenomenon which includes the high demand for student achievement through testing, standards, administration demands, and increased class sizes (Piske et al., 2016; Rinkevich, 2011). Teachers also feel that creativity is something “extra” and takes up too much time that could be used for instruction (Makel, 2009; Piske et al., 2016; Rinkevich, 2011). These beliefs create challenges to the creative teacher and classroom.

When creativity is posed to teachers it is often synonymous with the arts, imagination, or problem-solving (Steers, 2009). Yet, creative teaching includes a “unique, customized, and meaningful exchange of knowledge among all individuals in a learning context” (Rinkevich, 2011, 219). Teacher candidates who have the opportunity to participate in an arts integration course in their course of study are more likely to develop their

creativity and sense of self-efficacy in teaching the arts (Vetere III, 2016). When teachers are able to engage and implement creative lessons employing the arts in a cross-curricular model the students are more engaged and deep learning occurs (Vetere III, 2016). Student achievement therefore improves with lessons that utilize creative teaching.

Utilizing the established research, the researchers define creative teaching, in this study, as the act of engaging student learning through a meaningful exchange of information in a unique context that calls upon the arts, as a method, for pedagogical engagement.

### **Puppetry in education**



Puppetry in education has a far reaching and integrated history from puppet theatre performed in schools, to storytelling using puppets, to arts integration. In 1935, the United States Federal Theatre Project employed puppet-artists to perform puppet theatre in schools (Federal Theatre Project Collection, 1936-1939). As schools welcomed puppet troupes

to entertain and educate the children, teachers also received “specialized training” in puppetry as well as storytelling (Arboleda, 2019). Teachers were taught how they could have their students perform their own puppet shows and teach about the elements of story in the process. During this time, puppetry in education was found in many schools across the United States to teach subject matter and values through stories and social engagement opportunities.

In 1976, Currell stated,

Puppets provide the opportunities to meet, explore, and understand a wide range of concepts, knowledge, skills, and situations. Puppetry also provides a stimulus for, and reinforcement of, the child’s learning as he/she engages in a wealth of concrete experiences, which are linked to a purposeful activity (Currell, 1976, 55).

Puppetry was included in the classroom and in schools as a means to teach skills and concepts through the art form. Puppets were used as characters to instruct concepts and also teach the art of puppet theatre. Hunt and Renfro (1982) recognized the potential of the puppet as a teaching tool in the classroom. Their book, *Puppetry in Early Childhood Education*, recognized the diverse possibilities of the puppet. They stated, “Puppetry offers a magnificent opportunity to serve the teacher as a tool in broadening these dimensions, offering a great degree of flexibility in meeting the requirements of the classroom as well as discovering the sense of uniqueness in both child and teacher” (Hunt & Renfro, 1982, 17). Their work with puppetry and young people captivated many teacher’s curiosity and simplistic approach in using the puppet in both formal and informal educational settings to teach the arts and non-arts subjects.

Today, puppetry in education can be looked at in broader terms that integrate the arts, along with curricular integration. This can be referred to as *creative puppet drama* (Vetere III and Vetere, 2017). Creative puppet drama can be looked at as a derivative of the larger umbrella of creative dramatics, a process oriented, student-centered form of drama where students are guided by the teacher in dramatic scenarios. Creative puppet drama refers to “the action of something done using dramatic elements of puppet theatre with an emphasis on process, a non-presentational approach, and where the edification of the child’s growth is enhanced”



(Vetere III and Vetere, 2017, 24). When youths are exposed to inanimate objects that excite their imagination and stimulate ideas, thoughts, and discussions, students become more invested in the learning process.

Teaching children, in order to meet their potential, can be best served by a rigorous curriculum woven together with creativity using the arts. Preparing teachers that demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and disposition to act upon this form of teaching requires further research. The use of puppetry, as an artform, holds promise for meeting both “teaching with creativity” and “embracing the arts”.

### **Theoretical framework**

The qualitative research established in this research project relied on the social-cognitive theoretical framework. The purpose of social cognitive theory is to understand and predict individual and group behavior and is used to identify methods in which behavior can be modified or changed (Bandura, 1986). In social cognitive theory individuals are “contributors to, rather than the sole determiners of, what happens to them” (Bandura, 1997, 3). Therefore, individuals have the ability to affect their own behavior and the environment in a purposeful manner (Bandura, 2001). The components of Bandura’s theory consist of: observational learning, imitation, and modeling. The interactions are between behavior, personal factors, and the environment (Bandura, 1986). Thus, when a teacher creates an engaging creative learning environment by using puppetry, the students’ focus on the learning activity is enhanced, causing a possible increase in the learning outcome.

### **Data collection**

The empirical data was obtained through questionnaires and observations. Teacher candidates engaged in a presentation, an interactive puppetry and creative puppet drama demonstration, hands-on puppet construction, and dramatic scenarios using puppets as the catalyst. These opportunities were presented to 25 teacher candidates with 20 individuals participating in the study (n=20). The research took place over several

workshops and classes and all of the individuals were predominately female with 4 males, all aged 19 and over.

The questionnaire was 10 questions that centered on student background information about experiences with the arts and creativity, personal experiences during the workshop of enhanced creativity, and how they view themselves as creative teachers. The observations were coded by the researchers as to how the students engaged in the activity, dialogue heard, and skills demonstrated.

A thematic analysis of the questionnaire and observations informed the results. Thematic analysis is a “method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 79).

The results were examined to see if there was a significant relevance to the research question: How do teacher candidates view puppetry arts in relation to how they affect their ability as creative future educators?

### **Limitations**

Although the researchers worked to address bias through the research process, limitations included the number of attendees and the time constraints of the workshop. This research was open to all teacher candidates and practicing teachers with an early childhood/elementary/special education major, yet it could be said that only members interested in the arts attended this event. In addition, participants may have felt obligated to participate in the study due to the knowledge of the researchers’ faculty status or by their current instructors of their course of study.

### **Results and interpretation**

Participants in the study engaged in creative puppet drama activities as a group and individually. These hands-on activities used drama-based instruction that invited cooperation, communication, and problem solving to the group dynamic. Participants also used characterized objects and puppets to learn about character, conflict, and story. Through demonstration, attendees also discovered how to integrate puppets in cross-curricular studies, such as mathematics, science, and social studies. Lastly,

members constructed their own puppets that could be used in the classroom in a variety of manners.



The researchers coded the surveys and observations to determine how teacher candidates viewed the puppetry arts in relation to their own creative teaching. Three main themes emerged from the collected data. This included increased creativity, a sense of pride/accomplishment, and improved self-efficacy.

### **Result #1 – increased creativity**

At the conclusion of the puppetry arts integration workshop, participants indicated a greater sense of creativity. Approximately two-thirds of the respondents reported that their creativity was heightened. One individual remarked, “I feel like I am a creative person, but now after using these puppets I feel even more creative.” Whereas another commented that, “creativity is so important for me as a future teacher!”

Participants also realized their need or desire to develop their creativity. One individual wrote, “I love being creative, I guess I need to do this more often.” Whereas another commented, “I didn’t realize how much I need to improve my creativity.” Although the participants’ creative ability included a range, nearly all individuals demonstrated the potential for creativity and their creative abilities can be taught and learned (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). These, along with other indicators in the data reflected a sense of personal creative growth.



However, a few individuals recognized that their creativity had remained the same. One individual honestly stated, “I’m not creative” while another individual believed that her original creativity is lacking by stating, “creativity just isn’t my thing.” Yet, it could be said that these remarks could be reflective of negative past experiences with creative endeavors that affected their understanding and engagement with creativity.

Overall, a majority of the participants who completed the survey responses indicated a growth in their personal feelings towards their personal level of creativity. In addition, researchers observed creative behavior and social interactions that concluded in creative solutions or ideas by using the puppets. The puppets acted as a catalyst for dramatic scenarios which invited improvisation, discovery, and questioning. Building the puppets challenged the students to try out different materials, solve problems, and learn from one another. These events all stimulated individual and group creativity. Creative teachers who can participate in creative lessons are more likely to develop lessons that are insightful and enhance the interest in the subject matter (Rinkevich, 2011). When teachers exercise creativity in their classrooms, creative teaching and accountability can work in tandem (Schacter, Thum and Zifkin, 2006).

### **Result #2 – sense of pride/accomplishment**

Individuals who participated in this study indicated a sense of pride after participating in the workshop. The second most remarked entity in the survey by the participants was a sense of pride or satisfaction with their work. Participants indicated, at the beginning of the creative puppet drama activities and construction activity, that they felt embarrassed and unsure about their abilities. One participant remarked, “I don’t think I can do this?” whereas another showed reluctance or shyness when approaching the small group work. Yet, once individuals began the activities their personalities changed to be more positive, interactive, and showed enjoyment by smiling and laughing.

At the conclusion of the workshop, an overwhelming number of teacher candidates felt a sense of pride in their work. A participant was overheard saying, “That was so much fun! I’m so glad we got to do this.” Others demonstrated their gratitude and sense of satisfaction through complements and positive social interactions.

Upon completing the puppet construction activity, participants commented about their overwhelming sense of pride in their puppet. For example, one individual remarked, “I am so proud of my puppet, I didn’t know I could make that!” Whereas another commented that, “I love my puppet I made – it looks so good!”

Contributors also realized their internal pride. One person wrote, “I am so proud of myself, I didn’t know I had this in me.” Another commented, “I’m proud that I participated in this workshop, I learned so much and feel like I have grown as a creative teacher. I didn’t know that puppets could cause this feeling.” Individuals with a moral sense of “experiences of pride, then, can be a powerful motivator for sustained altruistic behavior” (Hart, & Matsuba, 2007, 118).

Survey respondents indicated a development in their sense of pride which, in-turn, can be a stimulus to prosocial behavior that improves the teacher candidates’ self-image to assist others (Hart & Matsuba, 2007). Researchers noted participants overwhelming enthusiasm, sense of satisfaction in participants’ puppet characters, and their personal growth in self-esteem.

### **Result #3 – improved self-efficacy**

Teacher candidates acknowledged a greater sense of self-efficacy after attending the workshop. Individuals noted a feeling or sense of being able to be creative in the classroom after engaging with the puppet construction and creative puppet activities. Therefore, the researchers identified self-efficacy as the third categorical response to the survey and observations.

Individuals who engaged in the workshop remarked about their feeling of self-actualization and sense of ability to adapt and execute the work that was presented. One participant indicated, “These puppets make me feel like I can be a creative teacher. I thought creativity was only for artists, but I know that I can be creative when I teach.” Another stated, “I feel like being creative is so easy! I didn’t know I was so artistic.”

Bandura recognized ability as “how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations” (Bandura, 1982, 122). Participants indicated their personal growth in self-efficacy by acknowledging their ability to engage in the arts. Furthermore, when participants are engaged in rich arts experiences, they are able to respond in a positive manner. For example, one individual stated, “I feel so empowered, I can’t wait to be a teacher!” While another remarked, “I feel like I have grown so much as a teacher today.”



Just as in teaching content areas such as math, science, and language, a teacher candidate becomes more confident in their ability to teach through practical experiences with integrating the arts. Engaging with puppet activities provides an avenue for creative teaching through self-efficacy.

### **Conclusion**

Teacher candidates are often faced with the challenge of learning the subject content they will teach, along with pedagogical and dispositional skills necessary for the classroom. These students participate in intense testing, rigorous coursework, and intense field-work. Although competent educators emerge through this process, many may not have the creative skills necessary to engage today's young learners. By limiting teacher candidates' access for personal growth, using creativity and the arts may not benefit the learning outcomes of the classroom. However, by teaching creative skills the teacher candidates can learn to create more engaging

lessons in order to enhance student outcomes, therefore the use of creative teaching and accountability are complementary (Schacter, Thum and Zifkin, 2006).

Teachers are often hesitant to take creative risks in their classrooms due to the limited conditions of the educational system (Steers, 2009). This may include time, resources, and curricular restraints. Yet, when teachers can think creatively, they are able to overcome these obstacles and discover new ways to invigorate their teaching and the classroom achievement. Prospective teachers and practicing teachers need the opportunity to model quality arts integration and creative puppet drama to gain the confidence and self-efficacy to teach the arts. When prospective teachers are challenged by the arts to exercise their skills in creativity, they learn to use a variety of internal and social skills, crucial for the classroom. These intrinsic motivators include self-discipline, problem solving, self-evaluation, reflection, flexibility, and personal responsibility. While some teacher candidates are intrinsically more creative than others, creative skills can be improved and learned (de Bono, 1992).

In reflecting about this research project, it became evident that not only future teachers but practicing teachers develop creativity skills when given the gift of time, rich materials, coaching, and focus. These ingredients aid in the development of a purposeful creative teacher.

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Michael J. Vetere III, Ed.D., Associate  
Professor  
Illinois State University, Normal,  
Illinois, U.S.A.  
5700 School of Theatre and Dance  
Normal, IL 61790-5700  
U.S.A.  
[mjvetere@ilstu.edu](mailto:mjvetere@ilstu.edu)

Michael J. Vetere III, Ed.D. is Head of Theatre Teacher Education and Associate Professor of Creative Drama and Puppetry at Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois, USA. He chairs the US Puppetry in Education and Therapy (*Group*) as part of the Puppeteers of America. Dr. Vetere presents on topics in puppetry, arts integration, and creative drama and is an active member with the Association of Teacher Educators. He was awarded the Outstanding Teacher Award for the College of Fine Arts.



Mary T. Vetere, Ed.D., Professor  
Emeritus  
Slippery Rock University, Slippery  
Rock, Pennsylvania  
U.S.A.

Mary T. Vetere, Ed.D. was the former Chairperson of Elementary/Early Childhood Education at Slippery Rock University. Her focus was Early Childhood Education, Teacher Preparation, Family Engagement, and Integrating the Creative Arts. She presented at various local, state, regional, national, and international conferences. Dr. Vetere loves creating a learning environment for students that is non-threatening, encouraging, engaging, and trustful. She is an active member of the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the Association of Teacher Educators.



Matteo Corbucci  
**Playing the Game of Theater Together:  
The Use of Puppets in Social Inclusion Activities**

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*Professional paper*

**Abstract:** This article tells of a successful linked activity using the puppet as a pedagogical and artistic tool, during a series of socio-cultural activities carried out throughout Italy: in the context of amateur theater. The aim of the project was to enable a group of young people to meet people with different (dis)abilities for the first time, to share a beneficial recreational experience with them: with the opportunity for everyone to experiment with the complete and integrated language of the animated object. The choice of an unconventional expressive medium, unfamiliar to most, is linked to its particular materials and symbolic language, but also to the fact that the intention of this project was to enhance the traditional arts, and the historical, artistic and cultural heritage of the regions that people inhabit. What this experience has confirmed is that the use of the puppet from a pedagogical perspective of relating and learning through play (long before reaching theatrical staging), proves to be an expressive instrument suitable for everyone, which is so accessible to use, as it engages all in participation. Indeed, spontaneous and creative use of this medium arises from fundamental traits of human nature and makes connections with them easily even in vulnerable situations; it is therefore a powerful facilitator for creating relationships within the community and for sharing personal and collective biographies. Moreover, what has been highlighted is that it is an extremely useful means of initiating a theatrical practice that allows everyone, of whatever ability, to participate in a creative and expressive activity.

**Key words:** inclusion, puppetry, the pedagogy of objects, animation, expression, creativity

## Introduction

The FONDAMENTA project – A NETWORK OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN SOCIAL SETTINGS<sup>10</sup>, via the Italian Amateur Theater Federation (FITA), and funded by a call from the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies, includes, among other things, at least twenty workshops to be carried out in all regions of Italy. These are offered to young adults from 18 to 30 years of age – interested in various ways in the use of artistic-expressive languages in social intervention and guided by experienced trainers and teachers – an experience within amateur theater as an opportunity to meet people in various states of disability, discomfort or vulnerability and get involved with them in a recreational activity aimed at holistic health, with an artistic purpose.

Among the general objectives of the FONDAMENTA project are:

- The promotion of quality, fair and inclusive education and learning opportunities for all
- The promotion of just, peaceful and inclusive societies
- and between the areas of intervention:
- The development of a culture of volunteering, particularly among young people and within schools
- Support for social inclusion, in particular for people with disabilities and those who are not self-sufficient

In this article, one representative example of a social-inclusion activity of this kind is examined that culminated in a performance with puppets staged by people with and without disabilities in the region of Abruzzo, in the center of Italy. Training, workshops and finally the performance were carried out with consideration for the pedagogical perspective in social intervention, the ethno-anthropological contribution (considering the heritage of the popular culture of the territory where the event took place), and an integrated experience of movement, music and theater. The workshop took place in Pescara and Chieti in 2019 and culminated with a show at the Teatro Marruccino in Chieti: the popular cult of S. Antony

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10 National project FONDAMENTA – UNA RETE DI GIOVANI PER IL SOCIALE: the authors are Biagio Graziano as a professional trainer in music education with an intergenerational perspective, and Matteo Corbucci as a professional trainer of puppetry in educational and social fields. <https://www.fitateatro.it/public/site/page?view=fondamenta>

the Abbot was staged, with the show *Il maiale di S. Antonio* (*St Anthony's Pig*) (the images in the article refer to this project).



### **An integrated approach combining education and theater**

During this project, the focus was on the puppet as completely the center of interest, as well as a useful educational tool for social inclusion and to combat educational poverty. An approach from the pedagogical perspective, together with the learning of the techniques and languages of that particular artistic tool, has allowed us to recognize certain typical human way of expressions and creation throughout the course of the project (such as, expressiveness, imagination, playing, creativity, handiwork, narration, fiction, etc.), with the aim of enhancing their value from a human point of view that would become valued artistically later on. The amateur sphere, in this sense, is the ideal framework for an activity with



a universal perspective: with attention to that process that takes place according to a heuristic research: free from pre-established dynamics of expression, intended only for professional practice in the field of art. On the other hand, the knowledge and practices of entertainment disciplines become fully educational activities, for their undoubted historical-cultural value and as a heritage of technical skills, when they are presented from a pedagogical perspective: i.e. from a holistic approach and with an activity based on play. Learning is then complete from every perspective. You find yourself playing together in an activity in which everyone will find their own difficulties and challenges, in which they collectively achieve the best results and value each other's contribution.

During this project, the focus was on the puppet as completely the center of interest, as well as a useful educational tool for social inclusion and to combat educational poverty. An approach from the pedagogical perspective, together with the learning of the techniques and languages of that particular artistic tool, has allowed us to recognize certain typical human way of expressions and creation throughout the course of the project (such as, expressiveness, imagination, playing, creativity, handiwork, narration, fiction, etc.), with the aim of enhancing their value from a human point of view that would become valued artistically later on. The amateur sphere, in this sense, is the ideal framework for an activity with a universal perspective: with attention to that process that takes place according to a heuristic research: free from pre-established dynamics of expression, intended only for professional practice in the field of art. On the other hand, the knowledge and practices of entertainment disciplines become fully educational activities, for their undoubted historical-cultural value and as a heritage of technical skills, when they are presented from a pedagogical perspective: i.e. from a holistic approach and with an activity based on play. Learning is then complete from every perspective. You find yourself playing together in an activity in which everyone will find their own difficulties and challenges, in which they collectively achieve the best results and value each other's contribution.

## Meeting the puppet



The “burattino”<sup>11</sup>, in all its versions, does not present particular difficulties when it’s being used: in fact, it is generally animated by a simple technique, which can be easily learned or even discovered independently. Furthermore, the puppet does not require perfect manipulation, in the sense that there is no absolutely right or wrong way to animate it; rather it requires an authentic animation: in the sense that it assumes a credible life if animated by the human energy that lies in the unique personality of its animator.

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11 In the Italian language, the term “burattino” describes those figures that are animated from the bottom up by inserting the hand inside the dress: at that point, the movement of the character’s head and hands corresponds to the movement of the fingers. The puppets that have been created and used in the workshops that are described here are of the stick type, which can be animated simultaneously by more than one person.



What distinguishes good animation from bad animation is, therefore, the fact that one manages to give life to an object in a credible way, according to one's ability and in an original way. An animated object – in movement, therefore alive – will follow some intuitive or learned rules of coherence, permanence, visibility and relationship to other objects, which are not difficult to understand, but which are instead difficult to judge, in the same way that it is difficult to judge a human being who is different from all others. It is, in fact, more interesting in the context of what we are talking about, to find out what that particular movement has to say rather than bring it back to a standard common to everyone. This particularity of its nature allows the puppet to be an object within the reach of everyone, of any age and ability, since with it we can engage in a creative, collaborative and non-judgmental practice: a playful practice par excellence, that promotes liberation and the expression of individual and social potentials. A simple object with an elementary use, but which produces an effect that is never obvious or trivial and certainly powerful in its implications if used with awareness of its deep connection with human nature.

The puppet represents a blind figure, as it or its animators are traditionally found inside or behind the little theater from which the public is barely, or not at all visible. The “baracca” or “castello” (booth) on the one hand limits the sense of sight, and therefore the direct perception of what happens beyond. On the other hand, however, it allows the animator to place himself in a protected environment from which he can express himself freely with his whole body and project himself into the animation of the puppet. What is on stage is, in fact, the figure and not the person. In this safe environment, the animator is driven to activate and empower other senses: to draw on deep inner resources to express himself freely: to the point where the puppet himself, “watching” his audience, through the eyes of imagination of his animator, he will return to the latter the mood and energy of those, the spectators, whom he cannot see.



The puppet is a powerful educational tool. It has a place in many significant fields of human experience, from everyday infantile play, to the extraordinary nature of artistic production, passing through a special

contribution to intergenerational relations. This object, simple and cheerful, that is animated and that is the fruit of a genuine ingenuity, is representative of that game that lasts a lifetime as a characteristic neotenic human trait. Its use accentuates, enriches and improves work with the hands that directly stimulates the brain, activating a unique and integrated expressive channel. It is interesting to note that other fields, in which it is very effectively used, in addition to that of the Theater (in the form of theater of animation), are those of preschool and intergenerational education.

### **Rediscovering the puppet**



In the introduction to the activity of animation with puppets, the participants were welcomed into a prepared environment where they could familiarize themselves with these particular objects: with unusual and

fascinating results for everyone. One person confessed that he never used a puppet in his life. Despite this, having overcome initial scepticism (as later confessed) over the fact that the ability to animate was peculiar to every human being and that a phenomenon of mirroring and silent dialogue is created between the puppet and the one who animates it, the participants began to experiment, playing with the puppets. Following exercises for musicality and rhythm, they started to find another voice, the voice of their own inner feelings. Subsequently, a puppet-construction workshop was offered alongside spontaneous animation exercises: in order to acquire, through the work of the hands, a deeper knowledge of the object and its properties.



For this particular workshop, puppets moved by rods were built and animated. The choice fell on this technique due to its versatility and complexity, in both its construction and method of animation. In fact, having to be animated by several wooden rods, coordinating moving the head with each arm and hand, this type of puppet invites people to work

together, participating in the movement in coordination and collaboration with each other. The possibility that one of the animators (generally the one holding the stick on which the head is inserted) can lead the action of the others spatially, allows for simultaneous co-ordinated movement. This characteristic makes it suitable, for example, for people who are affected by a variety of mobility issues. The level of difficulty varies, and everyone can choose to contribute differently.



### **Animating the puppet**

Therefore, participants in the animation and construction workshop met people with Down syndrome. For some of them, it was most unusual to meet people with that kind of disability<sup>12</sup>, but having understood the

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<sup>12</sup> A broad reflection on the concept of educational poverty would be required here: when a young person, in addition to never having had the opportunity to manipulate a

meaning of the work they had done and the mediating function of the object they had built, looked after and finally brought with them, they used it, mostly spontaneously, as an effective bridge when they encountered the others. Sharing an object full of meaning, they went beyond focusing on the aspect of disability, but they met as human beings each with their own diversity. With a particular enthusiasm, strengthened and supported by a concrete object that spoke of them and their creative work, they found an authentic channel for knowledge and sharing, overcoming fears and an understandable initial embarrassment. They started sharing play activities with puppets and music to form a work group that could later try to play seriously in theater games. After practising for a few days and acquiring knowledge of the abilities of each person, we focused on a non-random plan: that was to tell a story from traditional folklore, using an instrument so ancient but so new, the puppet: that had just been rediscovered and immediately loved by everyone.



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puppet, has also never even come into contact with differences in human conditions that can undoubtedly enrich his life experience.



The whole group, therefore, of people with and without disabilities, engaged in the creation of a theatrical show: choosing to tell a traditional legend of that region, animated with puppets. A teacher trainer had the role of storyteller in order to guide the presentation and to support the improvisation of puppet animation on a shared canvas; while all the participants as animators – alone, in pairs or in threes – animated the puppets, following the progress of the narration: with an unbounded, fluid, engaging, dynamic, but also poetic effect. Vigorous participation and great commitment on the part of everyone was highlighted, from beginning to end of this serious collective game.



The non-disabled people were very careful to support the participation of people with disabilities in every phase of the project; they stated that they did not notice any gap and that it was important for everyone's contribution to be understood and evaluated. To this end, they constantly changed the way they worked, so that the experience was truly inclusive for each participant and was a pleasant and meaningful moment to be in the group. Finally, each of the participants claimed to have learned something from others and that indeed each of them had important talents.

## Conclusions

The happy outcome of the project was confirmed by the success of the show and the subsequent follow-up at a public meeting: to which everyone from the group of participants brought an extremely positive and even touching testimony regarding their participation.



All the participants showed keen curiosity and interest and what came out in their feedback is the sense of amazement at having experienced, some for the first time, the use of an accessible and powerful tool, which had been up until then rather unknown or mostly ignored. The proposal of such an unusual instrument had intrigued them and everyone experimented with enthusiasm in a playful, simple and engaging activity to the point of even performing in a show in an important theater. All reflected, in the course of the project, on issues ranging from construction techniques or animation to the philosophical aspects of the relationship between man and puppet. What we want to highlight is how easy it was (in the sense of being accessible and with a strong call to participation) to put these young people in contact, who by their admission, in some cases, had never picked up a puppet and had very different interests from the theater, to the point of getting excited by the challenge of animating a legend from their popular tradition.

Thanks to the open and welcoming way of everyone's contribution, in which the workshop and final staging was built, each student sought and found the best way to be able to offer his own contribution. No one was left alone or inactive, but each participant discovered he could join in, having fun, in the improvised construction of a collective story, with puppets, songs and music.



Specifically, in working with the puppets, they achieved:

*Educational objectives:*

- Understanding the pedagogical perspective when participating with vulnerable people in a specific social context;
- Participating in a community of practice and learning;
- Identifying one's own potential and that of others and implementing strategies to activate it;
- Discovering and experimenting with a new expressive tool to participate, communicate and share one's biography;
- Understanding of how to use the puppet in the social sphere according to the pedagogical rules.

*Cultural and artistic objectives:*

- Knowing the culture of the puppet: its use and its meanings;
- Knowing the educational value of animation theater tools;
- Practicing the creation and animation of puppets;

- Animating a traditional story with puppets;
- Working on musicality and rhythm through sound-body-puppet coordination.

Given the objectives achieved, it is believed that the puppet can constitute, in an educational and social project, a creative and expressive tool that works highly efficiently with adults, even in situations of vulnerability and disability, in the course of activities for social inclusion aimed at a creative and artistic target.

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Matteo Corbucci  
La Scuola dei Burattini  
via Arnaldo Ulivelli, 5  
00177 Rome  
Italy  
ilpoetadeibambini@hotmail.com

Pedagogue and puppeteer. Trainer, specializing in the use of puppets in educational and social fields. Endorsed by the Italian Committee of OMEP – World Organization for Early Childhood Education. Tenured professor at the University of Rome “La Sapienza”. Member of the FITA (Italian Amateur Theater Federation) Training Commission. Responsible for the national artistic and pedagogical project “La scuola dei burattini” (The puppet school).

Meg Amsden  
**The Value of Practical Experience when  
 Working with Elders and Puppets over 30 Years**

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*Professional paper*

**Abstract:** Attempting to answer the question, “Is training necessary for artists working in therapeutic settings (specifically working with the frail elderly)?” the author gives examples of working in 3 different contexts as an artist, with empathy, but without much prior training or a theoretical overview.

Example 1: A shadow puppet workshop residency, in a Norwich care home. The need for flexibility in adapting plans to suit the situation found – taking into account the health, physical and mental abilities of participants, furniture in the room, lack of support or interest from most of the staff – and in spite of it all, enable a happily creative social group.

2: A series of shadow puppet workshops at a Day Centre for older people with mental health problems, working with Occupational Therapists. The OTs’ understanding of the capabilities of people with “organic” (e.g. dementia), or “functional” disorders (e.g. illnesses such as chronic depression) to get involved is turned on its head by a practical puppet workshop.

3: Three shows for elderly people in Residential Homes and Day Centres, based on true stories. Encouraging audience members to discuss issues post show and add their own memories; listening to the audience storytelling and reminiscing; taking puppets and artefacts to show audience members after the shows, noting responses to handling puppets and props and differing levels of comprehension; and the difficulties and benefits of running practical workshops after the shows.

**Key words:** flexibility, adapting, practical, empathy, listening, intuition

“Is training necessary for artists working in therapeutic settings?” was a question posed by Broken Puppet Symposium 3 at Newman University, Birmingham April 2019, where I led a workshop for delegates.

When I first considered the subject I thought, well, I managed without any training. Why do artists need specific training? Working out what to do on the spot was how I had always proceeded (and still do to some extent), offering a choice of good materials, using intuition, and listening to what the participants wanted and were capable of. The results were often unexpected and remarkable. But on the other hand, my first project with the elderly was a weekly struggle. Many aspects would have been easier if I had known what questions to ask, and what conditions to insist on.

I started work as a puppeteer, making shows and running workshops for children and families, in 1977, after working in theatre and dance in education. In the mid 1980s, I taught creative arts (which included puppetry, film, dance, and drawing) to young adults with learning disabilities at Lowestoft FE College. At the same time I was studying part-time to be a Laban Guild Recreational Dance Leader. On the booklist was *No Handicap to Dance* by Gina Leveté the founder of Shape, an inspiring book that became my bible.

The purpose of Shape (later transformed in Suffolk to Artlink) was, and is, to bring the arts to people who have little or no access to it for whatever reason, such as living in rural isolation, being in prison, living in care homes, or being disabled in any way. We artists were specifically not therapists. The participants in our workshops or projects were people who had, “the right to participate in the cultural life of the community” (Leveté, 1982, 10).

We believed the arts could bring happiness and interest into their lives, and if this resulted in their feeling better within and about themselves, then that would be a wonderful result. The work would also benefit the artists by enabling them “to widen their work” (Leveté, 1982, 10).

I have had no training to work in therapeutic settings. Nor have I had a formal arts education of any kind since high school, apart from the Laban course and many short workshops in specific subjects. I just fell into the work I have done by chance.

My work with the elderly started in 1985 for Shape East with a 12 week residency, 2 hours a week, in a care home in Norwich called Philadelphia

House. I was booked to work with shadow puppets, and went on a visit to check out the room I would be working in. The manager was friendly and enthusiastic. Yes, the room could be blacked out and the large furniture moved around or taken out. It was on the first floor but there was a lift nearby for me to use to bring up my equipment. They had identified a group of up to 10 people who they thought would be keen to join in. They would provide a care assistant for every session. We walked past several sitting rooms, each with a circle of chairs facing a TV showing children's programmes, with elderly people silently slumped or sleeping. It was too hot for me, and the smell of disinfectant pervasive. It was my first visit to an old people's home and my heart sank.

On the first session I struggled to bring all the equipment – my usual shadow puppet workshop kit – up in the lift. No-one offered to help on that or subsequent occasions. There was a different matron in charge. It turned out there were 6 matrons altogether who worked in rotation, some of whom really didn't want me there, and even questioned my travel expenses claims, which was all they had to pay as they were benefiting from Shape's 3 month free trial scheme. In the room, the furniture was in the same place it had been before and they said could not be moved out into the wide corridor as "it would be a fire risk". The participants came in and were helped into the chairs. A woman from a day centre came to watch and "see how to do shadow puppets with her clients". I set up the screen, showed some puppets, and quickly realised the workshop I had planned was impossible. The day-centre woman was vociferous in her disapproval – as if I had let her down personally. I can't remember how the rest of the 2 hours passed.

This dreadful first experience led to me flying by the seat of my pants, working out what the residents could do and finding creative and entertaining arts activities which eventually led to a puppet performance. It was an extraordinary and memorable experience. I got to know some lovely people and learnt a lot about Norwich in the early 20th Century from them, but I dreaded every Tuesday for 12 weeks, had many sleepless Monday nights, and had to devise nice things to do in Norwich on Tuesday afternoons to help me get through.

I took in flowers from my garden – not the kind of unreal florists' bouquets the home was filled with. I took paper, pencils, crayons. They sniffed



the flowers and drew them. Drawing led to talking. Emma, nearly blind, remembered the nasturtiums in her cottage garden and drew her own beautiful versions. We did dance exercises from *No Handicap to Dance*, based on Leveté's observation exercises for mask work (Leveté, 1982, 86-87). We did warm-ups for the head and hands, and (my idea) movements based on their former occupations – making chocolates or shoes, tailoring, cooking etc. As they watched each other, conversations developed. “When were you at Caley’s Chocolates then?” and so on.

Going to the Fairground turned out to be a common experience. Everyone had been in their youth. They courted there and one woman helped her showman aunty on her stall in the school holidays. I took in a book of traditional fairground photos. Didi, who had dementia, drew marvellous and original fairground characters. What did you wear when you went to the fair, I asked?



Jessie with puppet. Credit Tim Hunkin.

I took in a bag of cloth with vintage patterns, and they chose what looked most like their favourite clothes. I drew shoes from their descriptions. They made stick puppets of themselves. I made a merry-go-round with an old turntable and added Didi's decorations and their flower drawings.

They sang from a vast repertoire of remembered popular songs. I recorded some and played them to them – and they sang along with themselves.

The final session was a party. We made an art exhibition, pinning their drawings on the walls. Everyone chose a hat from a pile of my mother's and my old hats, and the girls "went to the fair". The puppets danced round the merry-go-round as the puppeteers sang. My husband Tim Hunkin videoed them. And at last I got a cup of tea! (The only cup I ever had in 12 visits.)



Merry go round. Credit Tim Hunkin.

Enjoy Yourself: Philadelphia #<https://vimeo.com/334456525>

I returned after Christmas with the photos we had taken of the party. The matron in charge was frosty and asked what I was doing there. The residents were back in the lounge snoozing, but sprang to life and showed each other the photos with great animation and delight. (I returned to the home 10 years later, performing a show. It was completely transformed due to a change of council policy. There was one matron, recruited from former care staff; the circles of chairs were replaced by small tables with chairs around them; the TV was in a corner, covered up; and they told me they had a residents' council and activities every day.)

As a result of my struggle at Philadelphia House with the practical aspects of shadow puppetry, we developed a very portable screen/lighting system. Tim's suitcase screen made of aluminium was a bit too large and heavy in the end. Will Windell devised a lighter suitcase made of plywood for a travelling workshop.



Shadow screen front view.

My second example of working in this sector had an unexpected outcome. In 1994 I ran shadow puppet workshops for Shape Suffolk with Occupational Therapists in day centres for older people with mental health issues. At Ipswich Heath Road Hospital the OTs' understanding of the capabilities of their clients with organic (e.g. dementia), or functional disorders (e.g. illnesses such as chronic depression) was turned on its head. "We'll probably only manage one session with the 'organics,'" they said, "but the 'functionals' will be fine". However, the "functional" people were too slowed down by drugs to show much enthusiasm, getting me and the staff to cut out, perform, and play with percussion instruments. Whereas the "organic" people enjoyed themselves enthusiastically, joined in with everything, went back to the day room and told people what they had been doing, and came back for more the following weeks. (These were people with various forms of dementia, involving short term memory loss.)

I also ran a workshop at the same hospital with people recovering from stroke – mainly older people – which was much enjoyed, and someone managed to take some photos.

Much as I love workshops and the process of unlocking participants' creativity, running too many of them began to drain my energy. I was in danger of burn-out, but I was not alone.

“Many times I left the hospital drained, wondering if the past hour had helped at all. It is so important to understand intuitively yet not to identify with any of the problems or illnesses” (Levete, 1982, 24).



Shadows with elders.

I realised I needed to learn to protect myself from other people’s dramas and asked my acupuncturist how he coped with the problem of keeping a safe distance emotionally from his patients. He taught me a useful exercise from Chinese Traditional Medicine involving imagining three circles of blue fire around myself to form a protective sphere. (Incidentally, this corresponded to Rudolf Laban’s three planes of movement around the body – the door, the table and the wheel, or sagittal, planes.)

As an artist you must also leave time for your own work, to refresh and recharge yourself. I am a primarily a performer and maker of shows, and it was time to cut back on the workshops and make a show of my own for an older audience, drawing on what I had learnt.

Between 1993-2008 I made and toured three shows with the Nutmeg team, with funding from Regional Arts, Local Councils and several Trusts. We commissioned backdrops from the artist Jayne Ivimey, music from the composer Jane Wells, who herself has extensive experience

of working with older people, and invited directors Frances Kay, Boris Haworth and Mark Pitman to work with us.

The three shows were: *Whose little Girl Are You?* 1993/94; *A Butterfly Rover* 1998/99; and *Knowliddle* 2007/8. All the shows were about real people:

My grandmother Rowley Wild née Rowland – teacher of dairying at Kingston Upon Soar agricultural college at the beginning of the 20th century; Margaret Fountaine – Norfolk butterfly collector/diarist/traveller whose life spanned the 19th and 20th centuries; and Arthur Patterson a.k.a. John Knowliddle – Great Yarmouth self-taught naturalist, cartoonist, journalist, sometime shadow-puppeteer and finally Member of the Linnaean Society (with similar dates to Margaret Fountaine).

It was partly the experience of seeing a show for elders by a local company that made me realise it was time to make my own show. They had researched a list of songs that the audience would have known when young, then illustrated them with puppets, performing beautifully. But they talked down to the audience – treating them like children – the worst example being a version of *Run Rabbit Run*, with bouncing fluffy lemon-yellow rabbits.



WL GAY M with May. Credit Peter Everard Smith.

I decided to make a show that took into account the audience's life experience, that did not insult their intelligence or maturity, while allowing

for potential problems with sight, hearing and attention span, which is very important when making work for elders. Here's a link to a trailer for the third show, *Knowlittle*.

*Knowlittle* short film: #[https://youtu.be/bKwD\\_72MiVk](https://youtu.be/bKwD_72MiVk)

Inspiration for the first show came from my discovery of a secret family history. I talked to my aunt, and it became a reminiscence project. Telling the story to friends made me realise that it had a sufficiently universal theme for me to be able use it as the basis for a play. I concentrated on shadow puppetry and actors, with only one scene with classic rod puppets. But this last scene was so successful that I introduced more puppetry into the two shows that followed.

As many people had difficulty moving about, we took puppets and artefacts from the show into the audience after the performance, and listened to their stories. We encouraged them to discuss the issues and add their own memories. Sometimes a debate would ensue. "I think your mother's decision to keep the story of her mother's mental illness a secret was the right thing to do." – "I don't agree! It's always better to be open, especially with children."



Puppets and ladies. Credit Peter Everard Smith.

It was often hard to tell how much was being absorbed, until we visited the audience and talked one-to-one. After the first very silent performance of *Knowlittle* a lady in the audience whispered to me. Was she trying to say something or just muttering? I put my ear closer and closer, and finally heard, “Did you make the puppets yourself dear?”



Looking at puppets. Credit Jules Carpenter.

Were they puppets, dolls, or children? There was a scale of comprehension from; looking at clothing and hairstyles, remembering what they wore themselves when young, and exploring the mechanisms; to sitting them on their knees and thinking they might be alive, then reassuring themselves they were only puppets; to speaking to them as if they were children. One child puppet was kidnapped by an audience member and had to be rescued from her room.

At “*Gesture and Artefact*,” a conference hosted by Cologne University’s Anthropology Department in November 2018, I was interested to hear about Jaana Parviainen’s work with a social robot in a day centre in Finland. They had a similar experience with the residents’ perception of the robot. Residents gave the robot a name and invented a history. There was the same range of levels of comprehension as we had discovered. Was

it a child, or a machine, a male or a female? (Even though it was clearly made of plastic and metal, had two people controlling it, and barely resembled a human being.)



Looking at puppets 2. Credit Jules Carpenter.

Response to our shows could seem at times minimal, but could also be intense, or hilariously inappropriate. I worried that the story of *Whose Little Girl Are You* would upset people, and had a sleepless night before the tour began. (The audience of 40 to 60 year olds at the dress rehearsal had been in tears by the end.) I was reassured to discover that very old people generally rather enjoy sad tales that don't involve them, and was firmly told that they didn't mind crying anyway. My favourite funny response was a woman showing her friend the leaflet for the second show (*A Butterfly Rover*) and saying "Look, it's about a lady who had a butterfly called Rover!" For this show, which we researched at Norwich Castle Museum, we were lent some butterflies from the Collection and took them round in a proper museum-style case.

We offered post-show shadow puppet workshops with *A Butterfly Rover*. It was very difficult to get venues to book. We were told that audience members would be too tired both to watch a show and do a workshop. I think the staff were often thinking more of the practical disruption that might ensue. For *Knowliddle* we offered full colour programmes in normal



and large-print size, and gave drawing workshops, inspired by Arthur Patterson's career as a cartoonist and naturalist.



Butterfly discussion. Credit Jules Carpenter.

These workshops had more takers, the most memorable being one at a sheltered housing complex in Reydon, and another in a secure ward at Hellesdon Hospital for men with geriatric mental illness. The drawing acted as a starting-point for story-telling and conversation; bird watching experiences at Hellesdon, and a remarkable tale of spying for the British in WW2 by Nick, a Dutch sailor (“I don’t want to draw birds, I want to draw boats!” he said), at Reydon. As he drew, he told us he had hidden in his rowing boat under the shelter of a barge during the phosphorus bombing of Hamburg – until it got too hot to stay and he somehow survived by rowing across the river to relative safety.

## Conclusions

We discovered that telling their own stories and being listened to was a valuable and empowering experience for people whose lives had been narrowed down physically and socially. The extraordinary outcomes of our work could not have been planned. We offered creative experiences and entertainment to the best of our ability, and were delighted and enthralled by the responses and stories of the audiences and participants.



Drawing of Kingfisher. Credit Jules Carpenter.

Some simple advice from venues on the physical and emotional needs of participants was helpful, such as their ability to move about, see, hear etc. but too much information about people's ailments, and assumptions about their capabilities could be very misleading. Better to use intuition and think of participants primarily as people – not “cases” – and trust that involvement in creative arts, especially puppetry, can engage even the most frail individuals, and access deep levels of memory.

Some advice for artists on how to deal with the emotional effects of working in therapeutic settings, how to protect and pace yourself, is essential. I believe that any formal training needs to be based firmly in practical work in real settings, building up the students' experience. But most important of all is this: to have the ability to be open and flexible; to have a stack of different ideas, materials and skills to draw on; to be prepared to stop, rethink and try something else if activities don't work; to listen and react to what participants want and are capable of, allowing room for them to improvise and come up with new directions; and above all to enjoy yourself doing it. And I'm not convinced that this can be taught.



Nick's story. Credit Jules Carpenter.

I am not currently planning future shows. The tours were only ever possible with large amounts of funding as venues could only contribute a minimal amount. Now aged 70, I have total funding fatigue. I hope that this paper will inspire younger companies/individuals to work in this rewarding sector.

This article started out as a workshop for The Broken Puppet Symposium 3. Exercises referred to in the text were explored by delegates and at the end they took part in some workshop activities:

1: Drawing, chatting, and very simple puppet-making.

In small groups. What did you wear when you went out for the evening when you were young(er)? Draw yourself on card. Cut yourself out. Add a stick. Get your puppet dancing.

2: How would you turn this room into a shadow theatre with minimal equipment? i.e. what you have in your bag/your room, and a small amount of basic materials provided – paper, sticky tape, pencils and crayons. Use what the room has to offer. Share at the end.

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Meg Amsden  
Nutmeg Puppet Company  
Bulcamp House  
Bulcamp  
Halesworth  
Suffolk IP19 9LG  
U.K.  
#<http://www.nutmegpuppet.co.uk>  
[meg@nutmegpuppet.co.uk](mailto:meg@nutmegpuppet.co.uk)

Credit Iklooshar Malara.

Director Nutmeg Puppet Company, Designer, Maker, Performer, Workshop Leader.

1971 M.A. Social Anthropology, Cambridge University.

1986 Laban Guild Recreational Dance Leader.

Meg 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 – Philadelphia House residency leading to further workshops and shows for frail elderly people.

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 the Broads Authority.

2000–2011: Chair British UNIMA, Councillor Puppeteers UK and UNIMA.

2004–2008, member UNIMA Education Commission.

From 2008, member UNIMA Education, Development and Therapy Commission.

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Larisa Telnova  
**Puppet Therapy in Penitentiary Institutions in Russia**

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*Review paper*

**Abstract:** This article focuses on a complex/difficult group of clients – minors and women convicted of various crimes. Analysis of the experience of psychologists in detention centers leads us to the conclusion that glove and folk puppets in art therapy, drama or play therapy are mainly used. Various uses of puppets are described. Young girls, after making puppets, play out their stories relating to their traumatic experiences. Underage boys meet with the image of the puppet as a reflection of the image of their own Self, using polymer clay for its manufacture. Convicted women are encouraged to turn to the wisdom of folk dolls. Taking into account the fact that the puppet is an image of a person, the image of its maker, it opens up opportunities to determine the actual, dominant feelings of its creator, their ideas about the world, about the various phenomena in it, about the problems that concern the maker of the puppet. Diagnostic features are covered in the article.

**Key words:** puppet, folk doll, convicted teenagers, convicted women, diagnostics



The healing and inspiring features of a doll or puppet have been known for a long time. So, magic assistant dolls are found in Russian folk tales like *Vasilisa the Beautiful*, *Prince Danila-Govorila* and others. They always protect and save a fairy-tale hero. However, these dolls – helpmates – also appear in the tales of other people living in Russia.

The healing and developing potential of puppets is used. An overview is given of the groups of clients that the puppet is offered to as a tool for solving a variety of problems, proving their diversity. Puppet therapy is useful for adults and children, men and women. This article focuses on a complex/difficult group of clients – minors and women convicted of various crimes.

Scientific research proves that the foundations of the world-view and further orientation of the behaviour of the individual are laid down precisely at the age of 18. The peculiarity of the work of psychologists in penal educational settings is that they deal with difficult teenagers, pedagogically neglected, with low intellectual abilities, mental disorders and particular characteristics. The task of experts is to help convicted young men and women to know themselves, enter the world of adults, and after liberation to fully exist and interact in it. Puppet therapy is among numerous sets of methods used to help teenagers.

Analysis of the experience of psychologists in detention centres leads us to the conclusion that glove and folk puppets in art therapy, drama or play therapy are mainly used. But, whatever therapeutic approach is used, it is necessary to adhere to this most important principle – the approval and acceptance of all creative products, regardless of their content, form and quality.

Most often, the creation of a puppet, which is healing in itself, becomes the first stage. Any puppet making is a kind of meditation. Being carried away by the process of making a puppet, prisoners become calmer, balanced, focused. "...changes in physiological measurement also change the nature of mental processes, which can affect the formation of complex mental patterns, including the personality of a person," writes the famous Russian psychologist B.S. Bratus (Bratus, 1988, 63).

So, young girls, after making puppets, play out their stories which refer to traumas they have experienced. During their plays, significant emotional states are played out; there is a discharge of strong emotions, and

release from them. Aggression is weakening. The soul is healed because the negative feelings that teenagers are accustomed to suppress are expressed in a socially acceptable way. Playing with a puppet helps to form internal control of their own actions, focuses on their own feelings, and improves social adaptation.

As a rule, the script is written together with a psychologist, although during the performance the participants are not forbidden to improvise. In the performance, every girl plays out her problems. The most common topics among juvenile offenders are family problems, lack of parental attention, child abuse by parents, anger, vindictiveness, violence, alcohol and drug addiction, loss of parents, homelessness, regular escapes from orphanages, the habit of appropriating everything that can be taken away from a weaker person. Animating a puppet, the girl sees that her every movement is immediately displayed in the behaviour of the puppet. This helps the puppet's owner to adjust her movements and make the puppet's behaviour as expressive as possible.

Preparation of the performance allows the creative abilities of pupils to develop – they make sketches, sew costumes, draw scenery, write verses, select music, sing songs, giving voice to the puppets.

Studies of the effectiveness of puppet therapy, conducted by psychologists of the Belgorod region, prove a decrease in the level of anxiety of convicted girls, which is important, since being in a constant state of anxiety blocks an adequate assessment of their surroundings. Self-confidence, flexibility in responding to changes in the situation, and restraint (control) of emotional outbursts, emerge.

According to the observations of prison psychologists, this type of therapy is also effective for teenage boys. Interest in themselves and others awakens in them, as it does in girls, and they become more active, confident, and independent.

Another option for using puppets in therapy is also possible. Underage boys meet with the image of the puppet as a reflection of an image of their own Self, using polymer clay for its manufacture. The image of the Self is the basis of integrity, harmony and stability of the individual, providing a point of balance in the inner world. The concept of “body image” is said to be the source of the development of this image, because it is the leading component of the image of the child. Anti-social teenagers have

difficulty in schematizing their body, building its image, reflecting their own senses and feelings, so “direct” work with the body is impossible. To get round this, it’s better to use a mediator – a puppet, made by a teenager. Taking into account that any creative product is a reflection of its author, the puppet becomes the mirror, looking at which the anti-social teenager can see himself, get acquainted with himself, and understand his attitude to himself.

Clay hardens at room temperature, but remains soft at a particular humidity. These properties make it possible not to limit the time a teenager spends working on himself, and allows him to make changes to the created image as many times as he wants. Here, in our opinion, there is a formula proposed by the famous Russian psychologist A.N. Leontev: “the inner ... acts through the outer and thus changes itself” (Leontev, 2004, 181).

Psychologists encourage women prisoners to turn to the wisdom of folk dolls. “Inside every woman lives a primordial, natural being, full of good instincts, compassionate creativity and eternal wisdom,” says C.P. Estes in her book *Women Who Run With the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype* (Estes, 2002). A folk doll helps to “wake up” this creature. As a rule, such dolls were made to create a sense of security, and confidence in the successful outcome of an event. Within the framework of the cultural approach, founded by L.S. Vygotsky (Venger, 2006), the work begins with a discussion of the psychological function of the talisman. Its possible magical function “is taken out of the picture” in advance, as not being within the competence of the psychologist. The psychological function of the talisman is emphasized. The decisive thing is that it reminds the person of something very important and dear to them. This memory is the main calming factor. The talisman gains true psychological strength gradually, as dangerous situations are resolved safely (or at least relatively safely) over and over again. Now it recalls all these successfully resolved situations. Discussion with the client of all such topics is, in fact, the organization of its orientation in the ways of using the talisman. The disclosure of the psychological mechanism of self-management with the help of an external means is an important step towards the interiorization of this means, its “appropriation” by the client. The best talisman,

forms and activates adaptive protective mechanisms that could serve as a national (protective) doll.

Making a folk doll with all its apparent simplicity is a process that requires concentration on your feelings, thoughts, actions, and on the image of the doll being made. The incongruity of the image helps you to understand what does not harmonize and what you can work with, alter, correct, add or remove – say colleagues. In fact, work is happening now on the woman's own inner Self, healing not only the inner but also the outer space – real relationships, real life.

Improvement of physical and emotional well-being (assessment of the subjective state of prisoners), reduction of the number of neurotic complaints (reduction of the number of requests for medical care), stability of positive changes in the sphere of behavioural and emotional culture (expert assessment of the institution's staff for women prisoners based on their own observations) is observed in women prisoners who have experienced art therapy (Shcherbakova, 2013).

Here it is worth citing little-used diagnosis of work with the puppet/doll. Such projective diagnosis is particularly useful in detention centres, as it facilitates the expression of those aspects of the individual that the client cannot express, as well as reducing socially un-desirable outbursts.

Taking into account the fact that the puppet is an image of a person, the image of its maker, it opens up opportunities to determine the actual, dominant feelings of its creator, her ideas about the world, about the various phenomena in it, about the problems that concern her. However, adhering to a non-judgmental attitude to anything a teenager or an adult has made, respecting their right to self-expression, it is difficult to make an unambiguous diagnosis.

And yet the puppet is used to identify problems and ways to solve them TOGETHER with the maker of the puppet. When asking questions, discussing assumptions that have been made, the psychologist and client build a dialogue, learning about and exploring each other's worlds. But this also allows, most importantly, the maker of the doll, to see herself from the outside in various situations and decide whether and what changes are needed.

The appearance of the puppet/doll, the process of its production and the process of playing with it can be subject to analysis. If we talk about

its appearance, the symbols of human drawing, described by F.L. Goode-nough and K. Machover, are usually used for analysis. It seems to me that these features should be used circumspectly in the analysis of a three-dimensional object, because they were formulated for drawn figures. However, they provide direction for discussion. In the process of making puppets (if this is done) particular interest relates to the materials used for making, the order in which they are made, changes to the design in the manufacturing process, and the maker's comments on that process. After completing this, you can discuss the puppet together with the maker on the points proposed by V. Oaklander (Oaklander, 2005). The theme, the plan, the role played by the puppet, the variety of role-playing actions, and the occurrence of problems and ways to overcome them, create an interest in playing with the puppet.

It should be noted that diagnosis is never carried out only for the sake of it. It is made in order to disclose most completely the internal potential of the client in all spheres of life.

Prisoners form one of the most complex groups of clients, especially women and adolescents in conflict with the law. Prison psychologists aim to help them find resources, not only externally but also internally, for mental healing and personal growth. Increasingly, they are turning to the creative expression of their clients as an effective tool for initiating these processes. Puppets (making and playing with them) provide ample opportunities for creative expression and self-discovery.

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Larisa Telnova  
 9 - 243, ul. Vesennyaya, s. Pervomajskij,  
 Zav'yalovskij r-n, Udmurtskaya  
 Respublika, Russia, 426073  
 mishka111@mail.ru

Государственное бюджетное общеобразовательное учреждение  
 „Экономико-математический лицей № 29“, Ижевск, Россия / State budgetary  
 educational institution „Economic and mathematical lyceum“ № 29, Izhevsk,  
 Russia

Larisa Telnova, psychologist, graduated in biology and pedagogical psychology at Udmurt University, in fairy-tale therapy, sand play and puppet therapy at St. Petersburg. Has used puppet therapy since 2001. As a psychologist, cooperated with a rehabilitation centre for children without parental care, a health centre for children with chronic and psychosomatic diseases, and was the Head of a Foster Care and Child Adoption Centre. Provides training courses and seminars for psychologists and teachers, social workers, students and parents. Provided puppet therapy for anti-social teenagers and juvenile offenders from 2011 to 2019. Now runs the “Inclusive Theatre Academy” project with the children’s inclusive theatre “Nadezhda”. Field of research: the destructive attitude of anti-social adolescents, anti-social behaviour, puppetry as a tool in therapy. Currently explores the therapeutic possibilities of making polymer clay dolls with juvenile delinquents. Maker of dolls (from polymer clay), collector of dolls and puppets.

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Marialena Tsiamoura  
Searching for the Characteristics of the Theatrical  
Puppet during Therapy

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*Review paper*

**Abstract:** The author of the article approaches the way that the puppet functions as a therapeutic tool. The puppet incorporates some theatrical characteristics, which, either on stage or during therapy, make it therapeutic. The puppet's play between life and death, the fact that it sets the human as god-creator, the omnipotence, the freedom and also, the sincere nature of the puppet are some of those characteristics. They can be a motivator for clients during therapy, setting the basis for them to express themselves and discover new choices and experiences.

**Key words:** puppet, therapy, theatrical characteristics, life and death, omnipotence, freedom, sincerity



As a therapist, it has become evident to me that the use of puppetry is therapeutic. The puppet is an excellent tool, bringing awareness to the client, and even more so, offers them the possibility of new experiences, expanding their choices.

As a puppeteer, playing with my puppets, designing their figure, constructing them and then giving them life has become a really familiar procedure. Apart from the fact that puppetry is my profession, my relationship with it, is therapeutic. But when I look at the puppets, I observe them living their life. I wonder: what is it that, eventually, makes puppets therapeutic?

My intention is to look for and analyze some of the characteristics that either in therapy or on stage, stay attached to the puppet. I intend to do it through the puppeteer's perspective. This concerns the theatrical characteristics, not only of the puppet itself, but of any object, that can be animated, can be given life, and exist next-to and together with the client in therapy.

It is not my belief that therapists should become puppeteers, in order to better know the puppet as a tool. But, in the same way I insist that a therapist should go through personal therapy before accepting a client into their office, I believe that a therapist should have passed through the same procedure and experience of how it is to be in "those" shoes, how the puppet can make someone enthusiastic or make them confront the difficulties of the puppet world.

One more reason concerns the dynamics of the puppet, and most of all, its function as a symbol. The clearer a view a therapist has of what renders the puppet into a symbol, the more efficiently the therapist uses the tool. I believe that the knowledge of those characteristics can lead therapists to a much more accurate use of the puppet during therapy, and also to an essential interactive relationship between them and the client.

Below, I describe five basic theatrical characteristics that I believe determine the puppet, and can constitute a motive for the client to work during therapy.

### **The puppet's play between life and death Or, leaving back old pieces of self to create new ones**

Puppetry is the art that fights par excellence against death (Markopoulos, 2013). During every performance, every soulless object comes to life, and in the end loses its life again. Every big mystery that is hidden within life – just like resurrection of the dead – is trivial for the puppet (Merschke, 2004).

As Sztaudynger says, when soulless material comes alive without resistance, the point of contact between the puppet and the spirit, is probably creating the puppet's charm (Jurkowski, 1988). The object that is animated, either shadow or marionette, either specific or abstract, manages magically through its movement to transmit, communicate an upper expression of human life, because it is part of both soulless material and mortal world (Paska, 1999).

The representatives of Romanticism dealt with this magic element, and its participation in the world of both soulless objects and living beings. They described the irony embedded into the puppet's expression which can be found in between its role as a human and the limits that the puppet has as well. On the other hand, Zich recognized the puppet as a living being with movement and speech that makes the audience forget the way it has been built, and transforms it into a magical and mysterious creature, beyond every logical conception (Jurkowski, 1988).

The attribution of life to puppets may sound crazy, but puppeteers – just like children – make conscious efforts to bring those creatures to life, and create the most appropriate circumstances for them to live. The necessary condition for that, is them playing, otherwise they (the puppets/objects) stay dead (Markopoulos, 1998).

But life does not necessarily mean movement. The puppet begins to emerge through its stillness. It is the lack of existence that gives it a role and life. It is the birth, it is the creation, the transition from one situation to another, from death to life that happens in front of the spectator's eyes (Kontogianni, 1992).

It is a phenomenon of everyday life that happens during every performance, every child's effort to animate their puppet, every little attempt of the client to play with puppets. Furthermore, it is a continuing circumstance that happens in front of the spectator's eyes. Just like life and death

happens in front of the spectator's eyes. During such moments, humans believe that: if a piece of wood can become alive, then they (humans) can live too. The spectators believe – deeply and consciously – that every creature on stage is alive, just because they want to believe the same for themselves. It is one of the elements that puppetry always offered to its audience (Markopoulos, 1998).

Thus, puppetry places humans into a game of life and death. The client in therapy, either child or adult, goes through a state of existence to a state which lacks it, non-existence. They give life to another being, and watch the puppet experience the same as them: life and death. They create space within, for the existential fear of death and loss, and they let themselves experience the solitude of nothingness that everybody is carrying.

Children need to discover and explore every hidden aspect of topics that grown-ups have difficulty in managing, like death. That is why they act that their puppet dies, as soon as they hold it in their hands.

Moreover, clients in therapy kill and leave behind – through projection – the pieces of themselves that torture them, to create new ones instead. The puppet can do that easily for them, and afterwards, let them incorporate the new pieces. When the puppet breathes, moves, talks, acts and dies, the person in therapy is born, and dies, and reborn in the same way again and again.

As Stathis Markopoulos, one of the most important puppeteers in Greece says: god is furious with the ways people invented to suffer their death with grace –or their life full of death. Puppetry is the commonest of these ways, the absolute parody of the birth and existence of our species in this world (Markopoulos, 2004).

### **Human as god-creator**

#### **Or, assuming responsibility**

Stathis Markopoulos elaborates in saying that God has a life-long grudge with puppeteers. He cannot accept that someone can give life to soulless material, besides him (Markopoulos, 2004). The birth of the puppet is a procedure full of demand and challenge, just like human birth. Any puppet performance, as with children and clients in therapy playing with puppets, is in fact a cosmogony in itself. Puppeteers, children and

clients are expected to give life to creatures. They also build a complete universe (with rules and consequences), a fact that, at least for puppeteers, leaves them with a huge responsibility (Markopoulos, 2003).

Since ancient times, puppetry functioned as a medium to depict the relationship between the Creator and their creation. The unknown and mighty Creator, without a name and omnipresent, is shown to be pulling the strings of every human activity.

The Arabs first introduced the perception of God as a manipulator, through determinism in Arab poetry and philosophy. Birri, an Oriental poet of the 13th century, writes:

Wise man seeking for Truth  
 Look up at the tent of the sky  
 Where the Great Showman of the world  
 Has long ago set up his Shadow Theatre.  
 Behind his screen he is giving a show  
 Played by the shadows of men and women of his creation.  
 (Jurkowski, 1988, 2)

This transfer has continued to evolve over the years. Vladimir Sokolov, a 20th-century dancer and director, described it as follows:

...striving to reach artistic freedom for his creative will,  
 man invented the puppet theatre. Through its discovery he  
 freed himself from the threat of destiny, creating for himself  
 a world of his own and – through the characters which owe  
 him total dependence – he strengthens his will, his logic, and  
 his aesthetic. In short, he becomes a little god in his own  
 world (Jurkowski, 1988, 3).

So it is the birth of the puppet that makes the puppeteer (and hence the client in therapy) a god-creator. This, however, does not only reveal their omnipotence, but also their responsibility. The puppeteer is called upon, not only to give life to the puppet, but also to provide an environment for it, in which the puppet can live completely with everything it requires. Thus, the need arises to create a world in which the puppet can live in, but the invention of this world is even more important than the puppet itself (Markopoulos, 1998).

But how is this world created? The answer is simple, but also difficult: through observation. Basically, the way through which humans exist and

analyze the environment. In other words, to give life to matter and to create the world that surrounds it, humans must first discover the qualities that matter has, its applications, the already existing ones and the ones not yet devised. And because all objects are potential puppets – since everything exists in matter – the creator has to observe their texture, their way of functioning and existence, in order to be able to treat them (Markopoulos, 1998).

Puppeteers care for their puppets, as parents care for their children. As they invent, create and give life to the puppet's world, they encounter countless difficulties. These difficulties are necessary to convince the public – and also the puppet – that this is indeed the environment that suits the puppet more than any other, the world in which it will come to Life. As pompous as it sounds, the choices puppeteers make, are the ones that make them god-creators. But this is also the charm of the puppet-theater and the experience it transmits in the same time: the effort and the responsibility that puppeteers need to undertake to provide the best Life for their puppet (Markopoulos, 1998).

Likewise, clients in therapy, starting to create their puppet, are called upon to observe it, to wonder what suits it, how the puppet wants to be, to find a name, an origin, a language, a voice. They observe within themselves, within what they already know and experience, and even more they observe the puppet so as to decide who it is. They make first contact with their puppet, they learn where it stands in the world, they wonder about what the puppet needs and they do everything to provide it. They take all the decisions for the puppet. In other words, they discover the responsibility of their actions and choices, but even more the responsibility for other people. They learn to manage the demands of these responsibilities, but also to enjoy the power that derives from the point where these responsibilities place them.

Furthermore, they create the whole world surrounding their puppet, an environment in which the puppet will fit and live as it really deserves. Weighting their choices or creating new ones, thus they take responsibility for the life of their puppet. As in puppetry also in life, they reject the choices that cause them trouble (the choices that probably lead them to therapy), in this way they accept those choices which make their mental world evolve, or much more simply make their puppet happy.

## **The omnipotence of the puppet Or, discovering limitations and possibilities**

Continuing to study puppet literature, it becomes obvious that, through the centuries, the relationship between creator and creation has remained, but what has changed is that: the creator and demonstrator of the world has become somehow “a little god” and the creature became fully independent, taking every function or element that was given to it (Jurkowski, 1988). The puppet may be the result of the imagination and work of the puppeteer (or the client in therapy), but once it is created, it exists with its own rights (Ackerman, 2005).

Even if puppeteers define as many parameters of the puppet’s life as they can, they are not enough to truly determine it. It is the same phenomenon that also happens in the relationship between God and humans. The puppet rarely does what the puppeteer asks for, and never has been guided completely. Its personality is so intense and charming that it plays (it cheats) the puppeteers, it puts them in its service and forces them to take the responsibility for it, since they created it. And what do puppeteers do? If they cannot give life to the puppet, then they get disappointed and either “kill” it or “let it die” (Markopoulos, 1998).

The omnipotence of the puppet is demonstrated through its complete, almost divine, freedom of its expression. It is a state of existing that can only be found in puppet-theater as opposed to the limitations of the theater (Jurkowski, 1988). The puppet is an extension of humans, a living creature surpassing the human laws of life, subject to another world, passing through time with calmness and bleakness, as mentioned by Katerini Antonakaki (Kontogianni, 1992). Unlike humans, the puppet plays the most dangerous games without fearing its death (Meschke, 2004), and even more speaks of or addresses any taboo that concerns and restricts an adult, or creates questions with no answer for children (Markopoulos, 2003). Humans admire the puppet and are jealous of the range of its abilities. As Heinrich von Kleist describes: Humans admire the puppet and they are jealous of its range of abilities, because they cannot achieve the perfection of its movements and skills (Kleist, 1982).

As Eleanora Rapp, mentioned by Jurkowski, says:

...but the marionette, an excellent mechanical creature,  
overcomes all biological and individual human limitations

and appears before us as a first class performer (Jurkowski, 1988, 7).

The puppet manages to permeate into reality, through its particular dimension and its immeasurable dynamics. Thus, it creates a new reality within the first one, a phenomenal, interactive, directed reality, and more so as real and true as reality itself (Kontogianni, 1992).

The puppet develops its own elements independently of its creator, and cultivates its omnipotence, just like humans have become independent of God. Through this omnipotence of the puppet, clients during therapy let go to experience their own omnipotence.

The therapist asks clients to observe their puppet, to discover all its potentials and to animate it doing no effort, except but trusting what the puppet really feels and wants.

At first, the puppet brings obstacles to clients, either its manipulation or their inability to explore all its potentials. Thus, they get to confront their own limitations. Through the puppet, they find possibilities that are hidden within the limitations, which, in the end, helps them overcome them.

As a result, clients in therapy practice observation and experience the process. Through the procedures of identifying and/ or permitting distance, they realize that their experiences, knowledge and skills constitute the basis for a new way of life. More so, they always carry those skills with them – just like the puppet does. These skills are inherent predispositions for shaping their personalities and lives, and they can easily bring them to the surface, as long as they trust their strength and their puppets.

### **The sincere/ honest nature of the puppet Or, letting be what I am**

The puppet is nothing more than what the spectator sees, it does not lie, it presents its real life (Markopoulos, 2003). It is a life that exists only on stage, and has in no way private and personal moments like humans have (Jurkowski, 1988).

The puppet is not an actor. It does not have a role, it does not pretend, it does not bow at the end of the show. It is what exactly it says it is. This fact defines its sincere nature. Since the puppet presents its life to the

public with an absolute sincerity, it is placed very high, up to the point of sacrifice, exactly where its story begins (Markopoulos, 2003).

Every puppet, either alien or humanlike, has this property. It dares to expose its one and only life to the public with no hypocrisy and to sacrifice it, thus condemning absolute sincerity. It teaches responsibility and generosity to its puppeteer-creator, and also to the public who animates it through its eyes and faith (Markopoulos, 2013).

This sincere nature of the puppet makes puppetry an art accessible to everyone, it makes it familiar, big and serious, without carrying the seriousness of “serious” or revolutionary arts (Markopoulos, 2003).

The puppet’s sincerity and its self-sacrifice on stage can trigger clients to share their personal feelings. As the puppet dares to share its problems and adventures in front of the audience, they can also drive off their fears and attempt to express every difficult and painful feeling in full honesty.

The therapist asks clients during therapy to describe their puppet’s life, its habits, its hobbies, its feelings and problems. And they watch their puppet being alive and existing, having no doubt for the presence and honesty that possesses it.

Alongside that honesty and authenticity of the puppet, clients let themselves experience and get absorbed into what the puppet is and what it experiences, discovering change. As Arnold Beisser says: “change occurs when one becomes what he is, not when he tries to become what he is not”. Thus, clients live the puppet’s life, and even more they experience and fully accept their own fragmented pieces, opening up more and more to change (Beisser, 1970, 1).

### **The freedom of the puppet Or, discovering the range of personal freedom**

Even though a performance, or just a puppet, is parallel to human reality, puppets do not cease to have much more freedom than they would, if they were human beings. Puppets can be objects, a piece of reality deformed, or even creatures.

Puppets do not live behind the scenes and public can only hear and meet them on stage. This is the reason why they are more free than any



actor and capable of creating stronger and more intense hallucinations (Kerner-Jurkowski, 1988).

These illusions created by the puppet are a feature that it always carries with it. However, the puppet is not real, it cannot be judged for anything, since no one can put an object through a process of judgement (Jurkowski, 1988).

Besides, when the puppet is created and comes to life, it constitutes a separate personality, responsible for its actions. Someone who judges or argues with them could be considered ridiculous and stupid. The puppet's freedom is the reason why children accept and feel safe when they use it (Chessé, 2005).

Puppetry dares to offer humanity the vital experience of sarcasm and parody in its most tangible form, without excluding the puppeteer from that sarcasm (Markopoulos, 2013). Basically, puppet-theater functions as an extension of the human personality, offering more freedom. It can lead humans to paths that they fear and do not dare to take, and in addition it does so in a safe context, without them worrying about possible mistakes (Ackerman, 2005).

Clients in therapy understand from the outset of therapy the range of a puppet's freedom. They try to leave aside – for a moment – the role of the judge they carry within them, the things they are ashamed for since they were toddlers, which their family did not allow them to do. They try experiencing that freedom safely and quietly in the enchanting world the puppet offers. They give life to the puppet, letting it experience every hidden and irrational desire. Thus, they observe and discover the range of their own freedom, their possibilities, their choices. Also, they find out new (or old) needs and desires which will lead to new experiences and which will allow their progress by widening the boundaries of their freedom.

Last but not least, I would like to talk about another feature surrounding puppetry. Magic. Even though the puppet is the simplest everyday thing around us, either the spoon in the soup or the puppeteer's marionette, the way it takes life in front of our eyes makes it enchanting. As gestalt therapists usually say: the whole is bigger than the sum of its parts (Perls, Hefferline, Goodman, 1994). Something like that happens with the puppet. Everybody knows it is made of simple materials, its movement

and voice come from the human who holds it, but the result is so magical that it simply surpasses the combination of the elements above.

The magic of puppetry, not the metaphysical one, but the tangible one, the one we meet in everyday life, the one which happens when humans quit trying and let go within a process, and see things happening and flow (as in puppetry), is the magic that the puppet offers generously and which I would like to inspire my clients. Believing in the fact that even a small piece of matter can come alive is what reveals to clients their mental durability and gives them strength to continue working in therapy, in spite of how very difficult life is.

The puppets meet the clients and relate to them deeply and essentially, and they accompany them on their therapeutic journey, along with their sincerity, their omnipotence, their play between life and death, their freedom. In the same way they relate to and accompany as the therapists to the difficult work that we have chosen to do. Let the puppets fill our offices, and the magic conquer our lives!

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Marialena Tsiamoura  
 Gestalt Therapist, Puppeteer  
 Ionos Dragoumi Street, 6  
 Postal code 41222, Larissa  
 Greece  
 tsiamoura.m@gmail.com

Marialena Tsiamoura graduated School of Early Childhood Education in Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Her thesis was about children's grief and the role of the puppet during it. She is also trained in Gestalt psychotherapy, and she has participated in a lot of seminars with important puppeteers. Recently, she obtained a Master's Degree in Psychology.

In the past, she has worked at camps, festivals, educational programs, art centers or spaces as a coordinator in children or adult groups, and she has performed in many different puppet performances. She has collaborated with the Kindergarten of Aristotle University, the Gestalt Foundation of Thessaloniki, and "Workshop of Life", at the Center of Prevention of the National Organization against Addiction in Larissa.

Nowadays, she works as a Gestalt therapist, organizing therapy groups and seminars, based on puppet therapy. She is a founding member of the psychotherapeutic network "VerbaTeam" and active member of UNIMA Hellas-Greece.



Åsa Viklund  
Puppets in Psychotherapy – an International Web-based  
Study among Clinicians

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*Original scientific paper*

**Abstract:** This article is based on an essay within a psychotherapy program at Umeå University, Sweden. The aim of the study was to understand more about how puppets are used among therapists nowadays, and to examine if, as well as how, they can be a useful tool in psychotherapy in the future. It was based on a questionnaire in English, including both quantitative data and qualitative information. Thematic analysis was used.

33 participants (n = 33) from 11 countries responded to the questionnaire. Responses show that puppet selection as well as inclusion is wide among participants. Hand puppets are most commonly used, and approaches are most often child-centered. Six main themes were found in the analysis; projective, symbolic, relational, empowering, evocative, and transformative dimensions.

According to responses, the method can be suitable for most clients, but it is especially suitable for children. Responses also show, that precautions should be taken with those scared of puppets and the severely mentally ill. For shy clients, there is contradictory information. Furthermore, successful use is related to the individual characteristics of the client. Examples of beneficial characteristics are curiosity, playfulness, creativity, acceptance, and an ability to engage in the method. Less beneficial characteristics can be an inability to play, inhibition, rigidity, having a strong cognitive orientation or negative preconceptions of puppets.

The conclusion is that puppetry can be a useful tool in psychotherapy.

**Keywords:** psychotherapy, puppet, therapeutic puppetry, therapy

## Introduction

Play is a vital part of therapy in general, as well as for therapeutic puppetry. Winnicott, an English pediatrician and psychoanalyst wrote in his book *Playing and Reality* on psychotherapy:

Psychotherapy takes place in the overlap of two areas of playing, that of the patient and that of the therapist. Psychotherapy has to do with two people playing together. The corollary of this is that where playing is not possible then the work done by the therapist is directed towards bringing the patient from a state of not being able to play into a state of being able to play (Winnicott, 1971, 44).

These words serve as a backdrop to the essay *Puppets in Psychotherapy – an international web-based study among clinicians* written at Umeå University, Sweden in 2017. The essay and the results will be described in this article. The aim of the study was to understand more about how puppets are used among therapists nowadays and examine *if* as well as *how* they can be a useful tool in psychotherapy in the future. For this purpose relevant literature in the field has been used (Aronoff, 1995; Bernier and O'Hare, 2005; Bender and Woltmann, 1936; Bromfield, 1995; Ekstein, 1965; Frey, 2006; Gauda, 2008; 2010; 2016; Greaves et al, 2010; Gerity, 1999; Hartwig, 2014; Irwin and Malloy, 1975; Irwin, 2002; 2004; Majaron and Kroffin, 2002; Ross, 1977; Viklund, 2017b; Wütrich, 2007).

It is a study based on a questionnaire in English, including both quantitative data and qualitative information. Comparisons are made to art therapy, play therapy and drama therapy including expressive art therapy and psychodrama (Axline, 1947; Blatner, 2000; Green and Drewes, 2014; Killick, 2017; Knill, 1994; Knill, Levine and Levine, 2004; Langley, 2006; McNiff, 1992; Naumburg, 1966; Robbins, 1994; Rubin, 2009; Shaverien, 1999). A quote that supports the aim of the study:

Among the most valuable yet, paradoxically, the least understood and utilized of these (play) materials are puppets. A random assortment of puppets is generally included in most playroom supplies, but the clinician is usually left to learn about their use (and misuse) in vivo, and thus often fails to explore their rich potential (Irwin, 2002, 101).

In the essay 33 participants from 11 countries responded to the questionnaire. The countries were Germany, US, UK, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland, Austria, France, Greece, Ireland and Luxembourg. The largest group were women and participants from German speaking countries. The participants were experienced and well educated on a group level.

### **Client group and work setting**

Results showed that participants predominantly worked with children, most often individually. Ten sessions or more were most commonly offered. Clients' problems were crisis or trauma, social or communicational, psychological, somatic or psychosomatic and psychiatric. Settings where participants worked ranged from private practice, the education system and social services, to Mental Health care / psychiatry and hospital.

Results showed that puppet selection as well as puppet inclusion were wide among participants. Hand puppets were most commonly used and approaches most often child-centered. Six main themes were found on analyzing the qualitative data; projective, symbolic, relational, empowering, evocative, and transformative dimensions. The symbolic and evocative dimensions were the most frequently mentioned. The dimensions will be presented below along with how, when, and for what, puppets were used.

### **The projective dimension**

The projective aspects of therapeutic puppetry include projecting inner life onto the puppet, as well as feeling protected by the puppet, engaging in a non-threatening situation, transferring onto the puppet instead of the therapist, also, moving to a meta level, looking at the problems from a distance. Quotes from the responses are: "my puppet represents the bits of me which I dare not be in real life [...]"; Puppets add a layer of protection when telling a story about yourself; Puppets as a powerful projection tool allow children to speak all different aspects of themselves with playful freedom [...]; A puppet can be brought alive and then it is a projection screen of all involved emotions, problems, anxieties [...]; With the puppet



the client has the opportunity to see his problems from another outstanding perspective.”

### **The symbolic dimension**

The symbolic dimension refers to the wordless and unconscious aspects of therapeutic puppetry. An object represents something more than the object itself. The dimension is multi-layered and naturally holds contradictions. It also includes bridging between the non-verbal and verbal. Examples from the responses are: “working with their inner conflicts on a symbolic level [...]; Letting the unconscious talk through the puppet in a symbolic language [...]; it is much more easy to “speak” without words about inner processes [...]; I can do things (or handle), what isn’t (even) possible to be said!; [...] the child can tell about his unconscious problems directly, you can work with non-speaking children or mentally disabled children.”

### **The relational dimension**

Positive social interaction is included in the relational dimension as well as conflict and problem-solving in relation to others. “Relational” can refer to the relationship with the therapist, or with other group or family members, and also the relationship with the puppet. Examples of this dimension from the questionnaire are: “Common play between the child and his parents. Functional and social-emotional problem solving [...]; social adaptation, communication with others [...]; parent-child interaction [...]; the child can see / feel / speak with a part of himself.”

### **The evocative dimension**

Joy, anger, shame and sadness are feelings included in the evocative dimension, as well as interest and engagement. Work in this dimension can be getting in contact with emotions, identifying feelings as well as regulating them. Examples from the questionnaire are: “the puppets appeal naturally to most children and they express their feelings with them in a way they could never do with words [...]; puppet play is a good possibility

and prop for children to send their feelings outside [...]; the puppet allows the child to more open show feelings like rage which normally are not so easy allowed to show [...]; It is a direct way to one's feelings! [...] they don't have to act out their feelings and experiences as they would in a role play. The puppets do it 'for them'."

### **The empowering dimension**

The empowering aspects of therapeutic puppetry include working with self-esteem, self-confidence, self-assurance, self-reliance, self-image and coping skills. Working with these aspects the patient gets strengthened. Some examples: "They feel more self-reliant and become more self-assured [...]; development of more self-confidence [...]; the correction of 'self-image', the search for personal resources [...]; The key is the understanding their self-image; participants can feel empowered and experience new ideas about themselves."

### **The transformative dimension**

The transformative dimension embodies change. In that sense, it is always a part of therapy, no matter if it is psychotherapy or a creative arts approach. It can be seen in a wide range of therapeutic processes ranging from self-discovery and rehearsal in role-play to healing and trauma recovery. Some examples from the questionnaire: "Playing with the puppets children feel encouraged to try out new alternatives of behaving and acting [...]; When acting or using puppets clients go to a place where they are 'me & not me' at the same time which allows space for self-discovery [...]; I support the children in the process of overcoming their relationship and attachment disorders and psychic traumas."

### **Therapeutic puppetry methods**

About half of the participants describe a method sometimes referred to as *Dreierdynamik* used in the German speaking countries. In this method, the client – often a child – selects three props / symbolic objects, then three hand puppets and after that decides which roles are played by the

therapist or client. Stage decoration of an ironing board is also included, for example by using differently colored shawls. The ironing board makes it possible to adapt the height of the scenery to fit the client. The client plays his / her story and the therapist assists. The approach is Jungian and includes archetypical puppets (Gauda, 2010; 2016; Wütrich, 2007). Other examples of methods described, are work with a readymade puppet-buddy, the use of a doctor puppet prescribing songs for bad moods, puppet making with polymer clay, papier-maché, wool, textiles, mixed material and recycled material, and the use of storytelling. A quote from a participant: “Children write a story about a character having to deal with a problem. Then design and make the puppets for the story to be performed. On this process we reflect together about different coping strategies to find a solution.”

Finally, a participant states what is not beneficial in these interventions: “They benefit least from only making a puppet and not playing with it or from only using ready-made puppets and not making some of their own.” This suggests that it is vital to offer the complete process from puppet making to play whenever possible.

### **When and for what**

Regarding age, many suggest children as the most beneficial group to work with, and some specify age 3 and upwards, as well as before reaching teen or young adult years: “I find that people of all ages can benefit greatly from puppet-therapy. For children between 3 and 8 years, however, it is a very helpful method for them to express themselves...” Another participant states that with: ...“children (4-6 years), it is often necessary to involve the physical experience...” However, some explicitly say it suits adults too, and others recognize it as a method for all ages: “Every age – from child to a person in front of death.”

Considering what diagnoses or problems it is best suited for, one participant says: “Children with low confidence and low self-esteem, aggressive children, children needing to make sense of a challenge in their lives.” Other examples: “children who are inhibited, those who refuse to be received individually, hyperactive children, psycho-social problems, psychic trauma; clients with a strong ‘inner child’, without serious childhood

trauma; all children who suffer from emotional instability and children who have problems in social behaving (aggression against other children or themselves for example); children who have not yet words for their problems; adult persons without speech (e.g. after a stroke) or mentally disabled persons; even autistic children” and at same time it is seen as not beneficial for “autistic children who are very deep in the spectrum.” Other examples where clients benefit least from the method are: “children with narcissistic disorders or profound identity disorders; children with perverse or asocial structures (seeking to destroy the group); adults with difficulties to be engaged in therapy; not advisable for psychotic or delusional children; overwhelming for people with psychosis.”

Finally, hope is offered even for some of these clients by a participant saying: “Over time, though [...], after watching the process, [they] almost always decided to participate.”

Preconceptions and engagement reoccur in the questionnaire as valuable factors for being a suitable client: “people who think positive about the medium [...]; Any person who can engage with the method and relate to it” and similar: “creative children with all sorts of problems; children and parents interested in emotional work; children or adults who love to play stories; adults who easily play; curiosity & social abilities in group work, permission and acceptance of symbolic work individually” and more communicational skills: “children who are to some extent capable of using language and who are to some extent able to communicate with me as a therapist.”

Therapeutic use of puppets seems least beneficial when: “clients think of the puppet as just a ‘toy’; children prefer not to create something concrete”; for “[...] persons with strong suppression; persons (mostly adults) with a very cognitive orientation have problems to release; very shy kids do not dare to play; (clients’) own preconceptions of puppetry work as they see it as childish; restrictive and inhibiting assumptions about puppetry; They could make children scared when introducing them too early (less of symbolic understanding); some children with traumatic experiences or with severe attachment problems are afraid of the puppets [...]; children who don’t like puppets and have a poor sense of imagination; children who continue to live in unstable circumstances; customers with a strong

‘controlling parent’, with rigid psychological defenses; [...] not all children are able to play – for them it is sometimes not possible to find a story.”

Other factors mentioned on the down-side of using puppets are; that it is time consuming; when clients’ resistance becomes a problem; and when an angry puppet is destroyed. The need for both artistic and therapeutic competence is mentioned as problematic as well, also the fact that the method requires equipment, that trained staff in sufficient numbers can be hard to find, that it is not a mainstream therapy tool, and that people may not consider the method’s own therapeutic dynamic.

### Conclusion

According to the results, the method can be suitable for most clients, however it is especially suitable for children. Results also show, that precautions should be taken with those scared of puppets and the severely mentally ill. For shy clients, there is contradictory information. Furthermore, successful use is related to the individual characteristics of the client. Examples of beneficial characteristics are curiosity, playfulness, creativity, acceptance and an ability to engage in the method. Less beneficial characteristics can be an inability to play, inhibition, rigidity, having a strong cognitive orientation or negative preconceptions of puppets. The conclusion is that puppetry can be a useful tool in psychotherapy.

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Åsa Viklund  
Ungas Psykiska Hälsa Capio Läkarhus  
Kvillebäcken /  
Mental Health Care for Children and  
Adolescents  
Gothenburg  
Sweden  
info@asaviklund.se

Åsa Viklund works as a child, family and art therapist in mental health care in Sweden. She graduated in Social Work 20 years ago, and has an ongoing master's at the University of Gothenburg. She has shared information on puppets in therapy on the website [www.therapeuticpuppetry.com](http://www.therapeuticpuppetry.com) since 2008 and arranged several workshops. Together with the Swiss puppet therapy school – FFT HF – *Fachverband Figurenspieltherapie Höhere Fachschule* – she started an international puppet therapy training course in 2019, with one summer week of training every year.





Eleanor C. Irwin  
**A Psychodynamic Approach to Puppet Play**

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*Review paper*

**Abstract:** Puppet play procedures are fun and easy to implement, but this modality is most productive if the child can work with a well-trained, empathic therapist. This strengthens the possibility of a healthy treatment alliance, helping the child to communicate deep-seated worries and wishes, giving voice to hidden thoughts and feelings that can aid diagnosis and treatment. A creative therapist who can facilitate play, using an array of aesthetically and interesting puppets can thus further the goal of helping children to move toward meaningful change.

**Key words:** puppet play, psychodynamic therapy, psychological defenses, symbolism, projection, displacement

Even in our digitally obsessed world, marionettes and puppets enjoy continued popularity with Punch and Judy shows still being found on YouTube. Popular TV hand puppets include (in the USA) King Friday and Lady Elaine from *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, as well as the Cookie Monster from *Sesame Street*. Meanwhile, theatre companies everywhere commingle live actors and puppets in shows like *Avenue Q* and *The Hand of God*.

The appeal of puppets is used increasingly in many domains including, not surprisingly, psychotherapy. Spontaneous play featuring people, animals and symbolic character types can entertain but also be shockingly violent and raw. Real, yet not-real, puppetry can portray penetrating insights about the human condition, but can also be easily dismissed as “make-believe” and that, of course, is what makes it psychologically safe. It is in this paradox that puppetry finds value in therapeutic work.

#### Factors leading to success in puppet play

Providing ready access to children's imagination, puppets are helpful additions in a range of play situations, aiding in diagnosis (understanding) and treatment (helping) for those who seek relief from painful “bad feelings” (Schafer, 2003). Two factors enhance the deeper value of puppet play: a broad assortment of aesthetically pleasing puppets, and a therapist with clinical sensitivity, intuition and empathy (Schore, 1994, 2007). To those necessary qualifications, one can also add emotional intelligence, affect regulation, and perhaps most important, comfort and pleasure in playing. Thus, one can help: preschoolers engage in a representational play (Sandler & Rosenblatt, 1962); middle-schoolers who have interiorized their fantasy lives (Piaget, 1962); and adolescents who struggle with identity, role confusion, relationships, and “second separation-individuation” issues. The goal of puppet play is to help children of all ages reveal what has been concealed through symptom formation, and, with the help of a treatment alliance, enhance the possibilities of change.

The suggestion: “This is play – not real, but pretend,” offers the psychological safety of disguise and a promise of not revealing (or being punished for) hidden secrets. What the therapist knows but the player does not (yet) realize, of course, is that while the story is make-believe, the feelings are real. By “buying off” the harsh, often condemning superego

via disguise, puppets promote the pleasure of dramatic play, promising relief from hidden shame, guilt and humiliation.

### **What can the therapist learn from puppet play?**

Both the content and form of spontaneous play give valuable information. Content suggests what the story is about. By delineating the characters and plot, content offers clues about the child's underlying conflict. The form, on the other hand, reveals how the story is played, the child's strengths and weaknesses and the kind of defenses employed against inner conflict. One needs to consider both form and content, however, in assessing the child's current functioning, as in the following story:

#### **Vanessa: The importance of both form and content**

Vanessa, a preschooler, played out a story in which a "bad dinosaur" attacked the villagers, smashing everything. In the midst of this rampage, the dinosaur was suddenly confronted by the town doctor. Startled, the dinosaur collapsed and fell over. Examining the invader, the doctor announced the diagnosis: the dinosaur had "bad blood" and needed a transfusion of "good blood" to recover! In an instant, the bad guy was operated on, and, lo and behold, was transformed into a good guy who, to make amends, apologized and restored all he had damaged.

Although the story's content was one of rage and destruction, the form suggested ego control and retribution. Vanessa's aggressive plot was not unusual for such a young child jealously dealing with two younger siblings. The form of her story, however, suggested a budding conscience, a sense of right and wrong, and a growing ability to regulate her affect. In summary: a basically healthy kid, expressing understandable developmental issues, exploring (fantasy) resolutions.

In this regard, one needs to be aware of the degree and type of aggression in the story, neither over-exaggerating nor minimizing it. Puppet enactments can be powerfully aggressively driven (sometimes characterized in psychoanalytic jargon as predominately oral, anal or phallic). Often the *outpouring* of violence, aided by disguise, is wildly exaggerated; perhaps in part because the player speaks through a puppet and not directly to

another person (as in drama therapy). In that sense it may feel safer to express ruthlessness (Åsa Viklund, personal communication).

Nevertheless, a child who can find a rationale and resolution for the aggression is likely to demonstrate greater affect regulation. One who denies or negates the violence, on the other hand, may be developmentally more fragile, with a more primitive defensive structure. In any event, it is important for the clinician to note the amount and type of aggression portrayed, and try to understand how it is explained/understood. The same principle, of course, holds true for any other powerful affect depicted in the story, such as sex, jealousy, greed and so forth.

### **Key defenses: symbolism, projection and displacement**

While the puppet characters may be split aspects of the self, or masked projections of the self and significant others, they are often disguised by the child's defenses, thus constituting a different kind of "language". Key defenses often used in play are symbolism, projection and displacement, which can roughly be defined in the following ways: symbolism is the capacity of the human mind to have one thing (unconsciously) stand for another; projection refers to the tendency to attribute to another (to "cast out") unacceptable ideas or impulses; and displacement alludes to the tendency to redirect onto someone else (or to something else), one's dangerous or unacceptable ideas. Since everyone employs a range of defenses (some healthier than others), one can see clearly how puppets can happily "rid" the child of seemingly dangerous, frightening impulses and feelings, as in the following example.

### **Joey: A preschooler expressing anger and confusion**

After being hit by a drunk driver, Joey was rushed to the hospital with grand mal seizures and wakened to find a doctor giving him shots (*injections*). Confused and frightened, the child eventually recovered but was tormented with bad dreams and panic attacks, especially before clinic visits. Exhausted by their son's "tantrums" and worn out by his sleep problems, the parents pleaded for help for themselves and relief for their previously calm and loving child.

In the first session, asked to tell a story using a variety of puppets, Joey immediately chose a bright red devil and a realistic looking boy puppet. Ignoring the puppet stage, he settled into my office chair, plopped puppets on the desk and started to play. To provide structure, I asked him to first introduce the puppets and say where the story takes place (i.e., the story line of who, what and where, indirectly asking about the motivational why at the end).

Impatiently, Joey began: “Well ... it’s ‘bout the devil n’ a boy, at the hoss’pital.” Quickly taking a pencil from my desk, the Devil gleefully and repetitively “stabbed” the boy, saying, “You need this one (i.e., shot), and this one, ‘n wait – (excitedly, with a red pencil) ... here’s a BIG one!”

So there we had it: a straightforward, thinly disguised story, titled *The Devil and his Big Needles*. As the nurse puppet, I “interviewed” Joey at the end of the drama, asking who he’d like to be and not like to be in the story (assuming that the characters were polarities and parts of the self). Joey emphatically said he wanted to be the bad, bad devil. “Gosh,” I said, “why did he give so many shots?” “HAH! He’s BAD – ‘n he’s ‘posed to get ‘em!” the devil said. “Bad?” I asked. “Well,” the Devil said, “bad for ridin’ his bike on the street!” (i.e., suggesting the accident was Joey’s fault, punishment for not following the rules).

What Joey imagined was real to him, not representational, a concept that Fonagy and Target (1996) call “psychic equivalence,” a developmental waystation on the road to reality. Still ahead for Joey was needed developmental growth and the working through of his confused understanding of the trauma. In time, helped by the “frame” of the treatment and a shared sense of play, Joey came to see that even though he hadn’t followed the rules, still, the drunk driver was responsible for the accident.

For Joey, puppet therapy provided, first, pleasure; second, abreaction; third, a strong treatment alliance (akin to a positive transference); and fourth, a developmental push towards integrating internal and external reality. Less confused, guilty, and burdened by past issues, Joey later went on to first grade with the beginning inner structure of a latency child (Sarnoff, 1976).

Joey’s play spoke to what is potentially healing in this modality. Telling the story from his point of view, Joey projected his rage and hatred for the doctor (symbolized as the devil), while also displacing his aggression (and

self-hatred) onto the devil doctor and the boy. To this array of psychological mechanisms, we have to add turning passive to active which links such play to the repetition compulsion and attempts at mastery through role reversal (Freud, 1920). As Waelder (1933) wrote, play is the child's way of "assimilating piecemeal" experiences that cannot be "assimilated instantly in at one swoop". With decreasing anxiety, Joey moved on to other themes, poignantly illustrating Erikson's comment that "to 'play it out' is the most natural self-healing measure childhood affords" (Erikson, 1950, 222).

### **Puppet play procedures**

Choice and variety of puppets are important in helping to make spontaneous play psychologically safe and rewarding. In addition to an empathic play therapist, it helps to have: 1) a variety of puppets; 2) a stage or something to hide behind; and 3) a semi-structured interview that can help make sense of the diagnostic data.

Using a range of puppets

To add variety, choices might include the following categories:

1. Realistic people figures (e.g., mother, father, children, young and old adults)
2. Domestic and wild animals (e.g., dog, cat, and bird, but also wolf, gorilla, snake, alligator or other aggressive-looking animals)
3. Royalty puppets (e.g., king, queen, prince, princess)
4. "Negative" symbolic types (e.g., witch, monster, giant, devil, skeleton)
5. "*Occupational*" puppets (e.g., doctor, nurse, and policeman, who often serves as a primitive superego, the arbiter of right and wrong)
6. Amorphous looking "characters" that can symbolically represent anything (e.g., a wooden spoon with huge eyes, material or fragments of fuzzy material, a star on a stick to represent lightning or magic and so forth).

The therapist is not limited by available puppets, however, because playroom toys are often used in puppet plays. While purchasing an assortment of puppets can be expensive, experience suggests that initial costs are worth the investment. Unlike consumable art materials, puppets can even outlast the therapist – with the possible exception of the symbolic bad mother (witch) and bad father (devil, monster) whose rough treatment usually means a shorter shelf life. Equally valuable are the (more affordable) puppets made by creative therapists, enhancing the pleasure for both child and adult.

Children also enjoy making their own puppets, thus blending art and drama therapy. Art materials like paper plates, popsicle (*ice-lolly*) sticks, styrofoam balls or cups, papier-mâché, yarn, beads or whatever is handy is often fashioned to fit the child's fantasy, as will be illustrated later.

### **Using a stage**

A small stage can be helpful, not just for puppet play but for many other dramatic play activities. For example, a popular stage, like the versatile one from Community Playthings (Ulster Park, NY), can become a classroom, store, cave, hideout, jail room or torture cellar with spooky things that “go bump in the night”. But if a stage is unavailable, one can make a cardboard “theatre”, or use an ironing board to give the illusion of space (Gauda, 2007), fostering helpful separation between actor and audience.

Although in full view of the therapist, psychic distance allows the child to pretend that he cannot be seen – a wonderful example of the “willing suspension of disbelief”. A brother and sister, for example, involved in filial therapy, played out their story behind the sofa; another child used the back of a chair, while still others crouched behind the sandbox or table, illustrating improvisational theatre at its best. The therapist helps by being the “audience” maintaining the illusion, looking steadily at and talking to the characters.

### **Using a semi-structured interview**

One of the first steps in working with children is to help them feel comfortable, because anxious children cannot play. The universal “play



signal” of pretend usually helps: “Let’s make a puppet story. Pick out some puppets for a pretend story.” Then, spilling out puppets on the floor, one can watch the important selection process, perhaps sitting on the floor beside the child (Irwin, 1983). When the child is finished, the remaining puppets are put away and the child is helped to find a comfortable play space. Since this is improvisational play, there are no hard and fast rules. The main idea is to help the child tell a made-up story – not one from a book, TV show or video game.

Richard Gardner (1971) described an interesting storytelling technique that I have often adapted for puppet play. Gardner uses the format of a television show and announces the child’s name (e.g., “Master Steven”) as the storyteller on a TV program. This helpful “warm up” technique is especially useful with anxious children who may find it hard to begin. In his storytelling procedure, Gardner re-tells the child’s story, altering it slightly to suggest a healthier ending. This, of course, runs the risk of the therapist’s misunderstanding of the child’s meaning(s) and thus must be used very cautiously.

Using the format of “who, what, where and when”, one can suggest that the child find a comfortable space and introduce the characters, one by one (the “who” of the story). If the child is hesitant, one can talk briefly to the puppet, asking for pretend bits of information about the character to help the child get into the spirit of play.

After the characters are introduced, one can ask where the story might take place, and then announce that the story’s beginning. If further help is needed, one might engage in pretend dialogue, for example: “And now, Mrs. Witch will come out to meet us. Good morning, Mrs. Witch! Tell us about yourself.” In this way, one *gauges* the amount of help given, according to the child’s need.

Puppet plays, in some ways, are metaphors, similar to day or night dreams. There is the manifest part of a dream (i.e., what we remember), followed by the “dream work” (associations to the dream that help to elaborate the underlying latent meaning). In puppet stories, there is similarly, an initial puppet story (manifest material) and “puppet work” (the associations to the story that helps one to understand latent meanings). And as Erikson (1950) suggests, play is akin to dreams in that play can also be the “royal road to the unconscious”. Sometimes therapists take notes to

capture significant pieces of information, but the need for an exact record diminishes as intuitive understanding grows.

Most important in understanding the meanings of the story are the names of the characters, the gist of the plot, crucial parts of dialogue and the name of the show. Once the story is over, the therapist can ask the characters to “come out” and be “interviewed”. Pretending a pencil is a make-believe microphone, one can talk directly to the puppet (not to the child), with questions to help clarify ambiguity and/or provide elaboration to enhance meaning. One might say, for example, “Tommy, could the policeman come out? ‘Good day, Mr. Policeman! My, you sure worked hard. Can you tell us how you knew the bad guy was guilty?’” and so forth.

Once core players are interviewed, the therapist can talk to the child directly, tactfully inquiring about (deeper) issues regarding self and other identifications: e.g., “Tommy, if you could be anybody in the story, who would you most like to be? And, then, “Is there anyone you wouldn’t like to be? (And) Does that bad guy remind you of anyone you know?” and so forth. One can also ask for a story title and “the moral” or lesson to be learned: e. g., “If other kids were watching this show, what might they learn? (Or) What might they say is the story’s main idea?” Almost all kids can enact a story with this kind of safe structure and playful beginning.

### **Preschoolers and puppet stories**

Young children are easily engaged in puppet stories, and, although their stories may be repetitive and lack coherence, it’s helpful to remember that their plots reflect a transitional phase between inner reality and external reality. Gould (1972) calls this phase “fluctuating uncertainty”, suggesting (as do Fonagy and Target, 1996), the child’s uncertainty about real/not real. Expressing fantasies about feelings/ideas, young children are not tethered to reality, but play out what they fear and/or believe is real. Their themes often center on bodily integrity, having/being a baby, playing/being dead, getting injured, having an operation, battling fires and bad guys. Trying to understand and manage their confusing lives, their stories circle around violent, dangerous themes – biting and clawing, pooping and peeing, attacks and counter-attacks, devouring animals and powerful monsters. And if the play gets too scary, play disruption may

occur (Erikson, 1950), indicating that anxiety about the real/unreal has been trespassed, as with Billy:

**Billy: Fearing his littleness in comparison to the superhero's bigness**

Play may serve as a defense against underlying anxiety, but that was not the case with four-year-old Billy, who seemed to be in a perpetually nervous state. Playing a story about superheroes killing little guys, he suddenly left the play area, zipped open his pants, pulled out his penis and said, "Want to see my wee-wee? It's BIG!" Having not yet developed the defense of repression, Billy was unable to stay with the symbolization in the story. The superheroes seemed to stimulate frightening feelings of littleness and impotence; scary pretend became real. In a sense Billy had to disavow his fear by (acting out, stopping the play) displaying his penis. His play disruption suggested a breakthrough of anxiety about his littleness (and daddy's bigness), with an urgent request for reassurance and confirmation about his intactness, maleness and power.

I offered Billy reassurance, saying that he had a very fine penis, just right for his age. And, over time, as he got older, it would grow, until one day his penis would be very big, just like daddy's. But for now, maybe we could get back to the story, and then talk more about the sometimes-scary power of superheroes and little guys they can hurt.

Because children like Billy are still immature, they aren't always able to keep frightening unconscious thoughts and feelings out of conscious awareness. Part of the therapist's task, therefore, is to help promote development and strengthen the boundaries between inner and outer reality, supplementing play action with talking and thinking. As Winnicott (1971, 38) reminds us, when anxiety is unbearable and destroys play, it is the therapist's task to bring the child "from a state of not being able to play into a state of being able to play".

**Barbie: Evidence of trauma in puppet play**

Because puppet play can evoke powerful active memories that are not yet repressed or suppressed, children sometimes unwittingly play out

episodes of past traumatic experiences. Ekstein (1966) points out the defense function of acting out; in an attempt to protect the self from painful anxiety, unconscious conflicts are enacted (i.e., acted out), rather than remembered. Barbie did this when she played out a story about a “Witch mommy” who left the house when her little girl was asleep. Then Alvin (the paramour) came into the child’s room and “knifed her”. At this point in her story, Barbie jumped up, stopped playing, and said she had to go to the bathroom, insisting that I go with her. Leaving the bathroom stall door open, she urinated and then stared into the toilet. When I asked what she saw, she said she thought she saw blood, “cause that’s what happened when Alvin knifed me”.

While most puppet stories do not open such a frightening Pandora’s Box, one is reminded of Terr’s (1994) investigations of trauma in which memory is suddenly stimulated by a sensory connection to a past experience that allows the “hidden” trauma to be recalled. Barbie seemed to make such a connection, albeit in the therapeutic safety of the playroom with a trusted person.

### **Middle school – puppet play with latency children**

In the middle years (ages 6-12), children’s fantasies become “interiorized” (Piaget, 1962), with complicated fantasies and elaborate plots. With greater internal structure and self-control, latency kids are more likely to use the stage or expand their puppet plays into dramatic play. Their dramas are often structured with complex plots, with a beginning, middle, end and a “moral”. Perhaps the invitation to regress in a dramatic medium provides relief from school studies, with play offering an opportunity for controlled regression. With greater impulse control, capacity to delay gratification, a rich fantasy life, improved language skills and an appreciation of humor (although often regressive bathroom humor), they are ideal players.

### **Tammy: Referred for anorexia**

Blond, excessively thin, eight-year-old Tammy had a pinched, withdrawn and sad look, and was referred because she stopped eating shortly

after her parents' divorce. In Tammy's first session, she made a picture of a frightened face; when I asked what the face might say if it could talk, she said, "Don't eat".

In her second session, Tammy enacted a puppet story about Princess Isobel, the King and Queen. The royal couple fought – a lot – but kissed and made up, and then had a big feast for everyone. But alas, the Princess couldn't or wouldn't eat because of deadly germs everywhere. Angry, the parents punished Isobel and put her in the castle jail.

Tammy interrupted the play at this point (play disruption?) and asked what she could use as germs. After some hesitation, she decided to draw colorful "tear drop germs" (a remarkably condensed symbol of rage and despair). Making paper plate puppets of all the characters, including "tear drop germs", she put popsicle sticks on the backs of the plates. Returning to the story, she waved the germs around the still-feasting King and Queen. Then, becoming angrier, she whispered, "You are going to DIE – the germs will make you sick!"

Since it was the end of her session, we carefully wrapped the hand-made characters, plus the germ puppets in tissue paper, put them into a shoebox, and safely "hid" them until her next session. Returning, she continued with "Chapter 2", when the Queen visited her daughter in jail, offering her "good food" (i.e., sand on a plate). Starved, Isobel ate the food, but then the tear drop germs flew out, making her sick, killing her. Sighing, the Queen said, "Oh well, now the germs are gone".

When Tammy insisted we bury the now-dead Princess, we buried her in a "casket" (a tissue box) in the sandbox. The royal family visited the grave, but suddenly the Isobel's ghost appeared, waved the germs around and hauntingly whispered, "Eat the (sand) good food". Hungry, the King and Queen ate the poisonous food and suddenly, they too, died.

Multiple variations of this theme were played out over time with puppets, at times alternating with art work, mostly focusing on the theme of rivalry, hatred and death of the poisonous Queen (akin to the theme of *Snow White*). When Tammy's depression lifted, she turned more to reality conflicts and talked about her anger at her mother, whom she blamed for the divorce ("Mom always starts it!"). Visiting her father in his new apartment, she surprised him by making (and eating) spaghetti using a recipe she learned from TV.

This example illustrates the creativity of much latency play but also stresses the importance of following the child's lead and facilitating the play, whether in puppetry, sand play or art work. With more elaborate plots, latency children make abundant use of symbolization, displacement and projection as they search for ways to express their inner turmoil.

### **Adolescence: turn to reality**

Adolescents often tell stories about their immediate concerns – school, sexual activity, drinking and/or drugs, quarrels with parents or friends. Responding to the invitation to use puppets, they improvise as they play out the issue, then and there. Enactments are often stimulated by discussions about reality and interpersonal issues, and when a teenager begins to describe a conflict, one can say, “Wait. Don't tell me. Show me. Pick some puppets and let's see the action.” This happened with Jimmy.

### **Jimmy: School problems and pot smoking**

Personable and popular, Jimmy had many friends but regularly fought with his parents who pushed their only son to do well academically. In his first session, Jimmy talked of being lucky, getting out of predicaments easily and said he didn't care about school or his “crappy” teachers, except for shop (design and technology class). And it was no big deal that he liked to smoke pot before his first class with his friends. “HEY! It helps me get through the day!”

However, in his third therapy session, his attitude was somber. He said there had been a big fight with his parents. The school called and told his parents that he'd been late eight times in six weeks. Furious, he said, they “threw the book at me”.

Hearing this, I said, “Okay, let's hear both sides of the argument. Pick puppets to be your folks and someone to be you.” Grinning, Jimmy chose an old man (a “Bum”), a witch and a Prince figure for himself. The story began with the phone call from the principal to the Bum father. Turning to the Prince, the father angrily demanded to know why the Prince was always late. With a cavalier attitude, the Prince said the school was wrong, always making mistakes.

But when the witch joined in, the battle really heated up. As the argument got louder, the Bum got angrier, insisting that the Prince tell the truth. The punishment, Dad said, was: no cell phone, no allowance, no seeing Janie (his girlfriend) on Saturdays... and then, abruptly, the yelling and the story stopped. Jimmy's face lost its look of bravado; he was close to tears. Throwing all the puppets on the floor, he said, "Those jerks! They really said I couldn't see Janie! I feel like kicking him in the-you-know-what – or running away."

The drama was over. The discussion turned serious and sad as Jimmy talked of his punishments, hatred for school, need for pot because school was hard, and his sense that he couldn't do the work. Maybe running away was a good idea after all.

This was new information. In sessions, Jimmy seemed to be a smart kid – verbal, quick thinking with good native intelligence. But when I said as much, he pulled some papers from his backpack and shoved them at me. Taken aback by the crumpled messy English exam with poor spelling and even worse handwriting, it suddenly occurred to me that this charming and funny kid might have a heretofore undiagnosed learning problem. By virtue of his native intelligence, he had gotten by for many years, but by tenth grade he could no longer fake it.

After some discussion, we had a family meeting followed by a school conference and arranged testing for ADD (of the inattentive type), because he did indeed seem to have a clear pattern of learning problems. Testing and a sharper diagnosis was the beginning of Jimmy's turnaround.

In summary, therefore, Jimmy, like the other (pseudonym-disguised) children discussed earlier, was able to address his conflicts through displacement and disguise with puppets, thus promoting the therapist's task of understanding (diagnosis) and helping (treatment) those in psychological pain.

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Eleanor Irwin, Ph.D., Clinical Assistant  
Professor  
University of Pittsburgh  
Eleanor Irwin  
128 N. Craig Street  
Pittsburgh  
Pennsylvania  
U.S.A.  
eleanor.irwin@gmail.com

Eleanor Irwin, Ph.D., is a Drama Therapist, Clinical Psychologist, a Psychoanalyst and a Clinical Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh. Ellie has made films and published many articles and chapters about play, drama and the arts in mental health. With Dr. Judith Rubin, an art therapist, she is a co-founder of Expressive Media, Inc., a non-profit organization dedicated to the arts.

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Karrie Marshall  
Puppetry and the Art of  
Therapeutic Connection in Dementia Care

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*Original scientific paper*

**Abstract:** This article shares good practice in therapeutic puppetry for adults experiencing cognitive changes affecting memory, communication, and cognitive functions. With over twenty-five years' practice research, the author aims to clarify how puppetry can stimulate and connect with adults living with different forms of dementia. The work is also known to support identity. Identifying elements of puppetry, that make these interactions possible, has immense significance for positive dementia care. People living with dementia, their families, carers and professional staff, have unique experiences of symptoms of dementia. People may become aware of diminishing language skills or problems recalling recent memories. Some symptoms may include difficulty with spatial awareness or confusion about time, place or task. This can be stressful for everyone involved. Each person develops his or her own coping strategies. In the last fifteen years, a move towards employing more creative interventions in dementia care, has rapidly increased. Outcomes show improvement in quality of life, and strengthen people's ability to manage better. The most common creative activities tend to be music, singing and visual arts. Puppetry, for people living with dementia, is relatively new. This article expands on the author's published work and helps clarify what puppetry can teach us about the art of therapeutic connection.

**Key words:** dementia, identity, therapeutic connection, creative intervention

## Background

Dementia is an umbrella term describing sets of symptoms that vary, depending on whether the dementia has been caused by disease, brain injury, or stroke and lack of oxygen, or by excessive alcohol or some other damage to the brain. Some forms of dementia cross-over (Whalley, 2011) meaning people can experience more than one form of dementia. Symptoms may include one or more cognitive changes affecting:

- Memory
- Concentration and focus
- Personality
- Language or communication
- Thinking, planning and organising
- Ability to make sense of things
- Knowing what to do

My practice research promotes an understanding that imagination, intelligence, creativity, humour and sensitivity, (to what feels right and to what feels uncomfortable), remain intact. The communication of these aspects can be difficult in dementia care. One resolution could be the use of applied puppetry.

First we need to understand that each person's experience of dementia is unique. Individuals are affected in different ways, to varying degrees and at all sorts of ages. The symptoms are not always obvious and may fluctuate depending on how brain neurons connect or misconnect. Differences occur because we have different starting points, individual backgrounds, thresholds, attitudes, stress levels, mental health, physical health, beliefs, nutritional intakes, education, and lifestyles – each impacting on how a person experiences dementia (Kitwood, 1997; Brooker, 2015; Marshall, 2015).

What is clear is that regardless of the form of cognitive change, the word dementia commonly instils a sense of fear and dread (Marshall, 2013, 54). During creative dementia care sessions people refer to feelings of separation from the rest of the world, upon being given the name of their condition. They often become focused on diminishing skills and abilities. Family members and care staff are more alert to signs of dementia. People look for the errors, or changes, in verbal language and memory recall, or changes in spatial awareness or ability to do everyday tasks. Not

surprisingly, this focus is a great cause of stress, which can worsen symptoms of dementia. This is due to the negative impact increased cortisol has on the brain (de Souza-Talarico, 2011; Ouanes 2019). Individuals and families living with dementia can easily feel trapped in the label and feel stigmatized and consequently isolated and depressed.



I've had a shock, but I can still sing like Elvis.

### **Where does puppetry fit into dementia care?**

I began using puppetry and other art-forms in care work in the 1990's, and more specifically in mental health and dementia care in the early 2000's. I attended various dementia care conferences around the UK, asking for the word "creative" to be added to the list of therapeutic interventions. At that time, the closest phrase was "non-pharmacological intervention". However, since the mid 2000's the move towards employing the arts in dementia care has rapidly increased. It is widely acknowledged that creative activity can reduce stress and depression and improve mental wellbeing (Hannemann B.T., 2006; BMA, 2011). These outcomes improve quality of life in dementia care and strengthen people's ability to manage better. Most research has focused on the positive effects of music, singing and visual arts. My practice research, shows puppetry can also

support identity and create therapeutic connection, which informs ways to improve quality of life in dementia care.

It is vital that interventions promote the dignity and intelligence of adults living with dementia, particularly as so many people feel a loss of autonomy and reduced independence. Being clear about the history of puppetry helps people understand its relevance. Applied puppetry for therapeutic use is widely associated with children (Bernier, 2005).



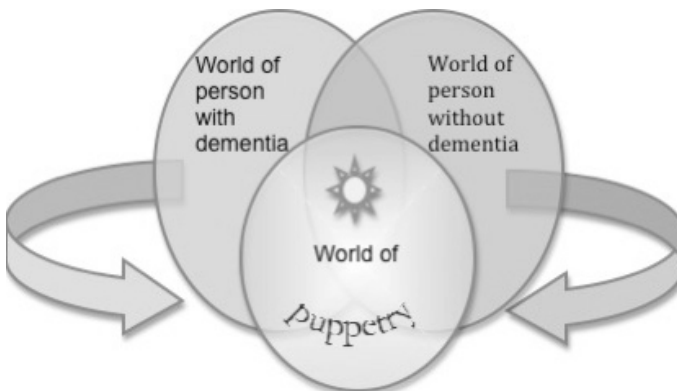
Shadow puppet group, Tain, Scotland.

This perception can cause issues when working with adults, who may be wary of interventions that could add to stigma. Therefore, initial sessions always focus on the point that puppets have an adult history. Puppetry has been used by adults, for adults, to make political and social comment and communicate news and ideas around the world. John Blundall (2012) argued that as puppets have existed since earliest mankind, they must be “fundamental to the development of humankind”. Additionally, Matt Smith (2016) identifies applied puppetry as a transformative element for social change, citing Gary Friedman’s work in South Africa around democracy and John Fox’s work in facilitating creative communities and the promotion of genuine collaboration. Puppets cross cultural divides and advance human to human connection. Set in these contexts,

the relevance of puppetry to communicate and connect in dementia care becomes much clearer as an appropriate intervention.

My own work uses multiple interrelated aspects of puppet-making, life narrative, expressive arts, story-making, story-telling and informal performance. As Lani Gerity (2006) expresses, this “complex web” of development is “transformational”. We witness positive changes in people (whether the individuals are living with dementia or in recovery from mental ill health). In public performance, audiences report a deeper level of understanding and compassion for human-kind. Participative evaluations and individual feedback show increased verbal communication, improved dexterity, increased confidence in trying things, such as using new materials or expressing fresh ideas, as well as more laughter and greater social interaction. My practice research shows how puppets can stimulate, support, comfort and communicate regardless of cognitive changes, including end of life care. Over several years the puppetry work has helped shape the BICEPS model of connection (Marshall, 2015, 50), which combines creativity, mindfulness and person-focused approaches.

### **Puppetry and mindfulness**



Puppetworld figure.

Puppetry creates a meeting space where verbal language, memory or questions do not have to rule. We glimpse a sense of something beyond



everyday existence. Penny Francis (2012, 24) comments that puppeteers believe “in the hidden life of things”. My sense is that this opens the world and increases our ability to “dwell in possibility” (Dickinson, 1951). Puppets engage people in a world of imagination, a world between worlds (Marshall, 2013, 26). We feel the connection to puppets on an emotional basis, which is vital in dementia care when cognitive ways of communicating are less reliable. We trust the feelings, the heart-to-heart connections and are sensitive to the life breathed into a puppet. Watching a puppet come to life promotes a sense of hopefulness. We see the inanimate change to animate. Jane Marie Law (1997, cited in Francis, 2012, 146) refers to this phenomenon as the reversal of death. All over the world puppetry is seen as magical and spiritual (Francis, 2012, 146; Speaight, 1990, 359), connecting people beyond words, which is a valuable process in dementia care.

This relates to mindfulness and the practice of connecting in the present moment with open awareness. Breathing life into a puppet feels meditative. It was through puppetry that I came to understand more about the power of being still, patiently seeing what emerges in the creative space. There is a sense of infinite potential in that moment. It is the same sensation I have when being with someone who struggles to find words. I know the person’s neurons are connecting, searching, processing myriad phrases, and I feel the energy of that potential. Being able to sit comfortably and mindfully in that still space is vital in dementia care, where people need not only time to respond, but a belief that they can. The BICEPS model of connection begins with B for the breath. Practitioners take time to breathe and centre themselves, which helps create a safe space.

Mr Lavern was a gentleman in deep distress. We observed how inconsolable he seemed on several visits to the care home. He was not responding much to care staff. His eyesight and hearing had deteriorated and staff believed him to be very confused and that there was little that could be done to improve his experience. Being from puppet-land makes it easier for us to remain open to possibilities and not to make assumptions based on reality. We sat with large, exaggerated feature puppets on either side of Mr Lavern and simply breathed into the moment. No attempt was made to engage, in case this increased his stress levels. The puppets breathed in unison with Mr Lavern’s breath. We were tuning into his presence.

Gradually the puppets slowed their breathing and Mr Lavern's breath became calmer. We knew we had established connection.

Over a few sessions, Mr Lavern became more aware of the puppets and engaged with them in ways that led to understanding his needs. It was a risk to use such large puppets, as Mr Lavern was a little shocked to see them there. But we assessed that the risk of everything remaining the same was even greater. Mr Lavern loved having something different in his world. He held the puppet hands and sang. His whole face relaxed. Words were not the way in to this connection. Silence was. A creative and mindful kind of silence that exists in puppetry.

### **Puppetry and identity**

Maintaining a sense of identity and having the freedom to be ourselves are important factors in western culture, promoted by human rights thinkers in the late 1940's. This is not a simple matter, as our identities are constantly developing and we have several ways of being ourselves depending on our current needs or circumstances.



Inserting puppet eyes.

When living with dementia, cognitive functions may change our perceptions of who we are, or as Bob Kahn (whose wife Sylvia has dementia),

says, “when we are”. In addition, responses by family, friends or colleagues may change. This makes “being ourselves” more difficult. The loss of identity and wholeness can feel uncomfortable and often distressing.

Ruby moved into a busy care home after memory issues prevented her living safely alone at home. Her room was personalised with her old furniture, but, Ruby had begun time-travelling, sometimes believing herself to be much younger, at an age before the furniture was hers. Perceptions of identity can become confused and alarming, not just for the individuals but for people trying to support. Ruby was understandably upset about being in a new and very different environment. This is a time when individuals are often searching for a sense of safety. Thankfully, puppetry can readily create safe spaces, welcoming individuals into something intriguingly mysterious, yet also familiar.

Ruby was delighted to see a puppet on the table. She was surprised that we thought she had the skills to make a puppet of herself. The session began with practical hands-on puppet-making, without knowing what the final puppet would look like. It is important not to impose set ideas. People then have room to suggest their own visions. Sometimes this happens organically. Ruby sandpapered a wooden torso, which led her to recall a love of working with wood, and being a land-army girl, helping to dig ditches and plant trees. During the puppet-making sessions Ruby’s life narrative increased. As Margaret Beresford observed “words become sentences and sentences become stories” (Beresford, 1966, 64). Ruby’s stories were focused on the land-army period. There was a strong sense of pride in that era of her life, which was echoed in Ruby’s thoughts about puppet-making. “I can’t believe I’ve made that. I am so pleased. She is just like me.”

The work required close listening to Ruby, recognizing her as an individual with her own thoughts and ideas, even if they are not initially seen or expressed. This person-centred approach seems more present in the arts than in care work, because diversity is more readily acknowledged and celebrated in the arts. Listening to Ruby helped create the features of a young woman in khaki-coloured dungarees and a forest-green jumper. Ruby checked her own eyes in a mirror before choosing the right colour beads for the papier-mâché head. Attention to detail is what makes the puppet feel intimately alive. Like an affirmation, the puppet and its

associated stories, helped boost Ruby's confidence, shown in her raised body posture and smiling face.



Mr and Mrs and Cat.

Matt Smith (2016) explores the concept of puppets being witnesses to events, feelings or experiences. In our work, the puppet can be seen as a silent keeper of memories, and a reminder of the person's involvement in the making. Each person's self-made puppet bears witness to their identity. Dennis's puppet was dressed like himself as a young man, but had the facial features of himself as an old man. Isobel's puppet depicted herself as a much younger woman, yet was described as being in the future. Jane's puppet danced on her wheelchair as she whispered "dancing queen". Michelle's puppet was caught in tangles of material, peeping with huge blue eyes through the holes. Sarah's puppet was her "little-self listening", giving her comfort and "getting on well". Bert glowed with pride as his puppet claimed impossible victories, and when his puppet was buried with him two years later, the story of the puppet was witness to the man. When Jackie's puppet wore the ball-gown she never had, the puppet was witness to her dreams. Jim's puppet, with its huge glasses, sat centre stage among the photographs at his funeral, as witness to the man's creativity, humour and unique vision. Each puppet transformed how people were perceived, which in dementia care, and in mental health recovery is fundamental for good quality support.

### **Puppetry and connection**

Harold Segal's idea that puppets are a response to human need to exert power and influence, and to "master life" can be seen in some of our co-creative small group performance work. (Segal, 1995, cited in Francis, 2012, 145). Terry's puppet show began with a barely visible man beneath layers of dark materials. He explained this is what depression feels like and that the puppet was stuck. Terry was asked to show what the puppet might achieve if the conditions were right. He depicted one of the most common human desires, to have a home and a mate. He made a shadow puppet woman, a house and a bright window. "It's just a story" he said; but he had set clear intentions, and within a few months, Terry moved into his own house and had a girlfriend.

William, a man with vascular dementia following a stroke, tells the group a fragment of his life story about the night a high tide and crashing waves surrounded his house. This is turned into a shadow puppet performance that the participants begin to adlib. William's house disappears into the sea, leaving the shadow-puppet man standing on some rocks. To everyone's surprise William is excited and enthralled and requests the group to do it again, declaring "That's it! That's it!" It becomes clearer through conversation, that the shadow puppet storm sweeping the house away is an accurate expression of William's feelings about having survived the stroke. He is still standing.

Puppetry can facilitate deeper awareness and understanding in ourselves and others. Puppets have the power to communicate at a soul level, almost unconsciously expressing our inner truths and the essence of our experiences. People connect to something within themselves (a memory, a feeling, a narrative or a desire) and through the expression of this, they connect to people around them. Positive dementia care means having positive regard and respect for each individual; finding ways to facilitate communication and support identity, including identities that shift and change. No-one is fixed in time and space, yet so often people are regarded as almost two-dimensional characters once they are inside a care system. Puppetry, with its ability to convey real and imagined lives also reveals stark truths. These can support a deeper understanding of the person as a whole human, with reference to aspects that may be hidden from us, such as an individual's imagination, intelligence, creativity, humour

and sensitivity, but which are undeniably present. When carers and staff can see further than the label of dementia, they respond more holistically and more hopefully, which has an incredibly positive influence on the well-being of everyone involved.



Puppet making.

Note: Names in this article have been changed unless specifically requested otherwise. Images have been consented by individuals and families.

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Karrie Marshall  
 27, Morrish House  
 Davidson Drive  
 Invergordon  
 Highlands  
 UK IV18 0SA  
 karriemarshall9@gmail.com

Karrie Marshall (author, tutor and consultant) has worked with creative process and therapeutic puppetry for over twenty-five years. She has managed care for people with multiple and complex needs and lectured in health & social care. Creative ways of connecting are central themes in her work. She set up a small touring puppet company (Zenwing Puppets), which became deeply involved in dementia care. The development of the “BICEPS model-of-connection” came out of this. Karrie founded Creativity In Care (a community interest company), which uses the BICEPS model in participatory and community arts for wellbeing, inclusion and joyfulness. Her work is mainly associated with positive dementia care, and she has given talks in UK, Canada and Japan. Karrie currently lives in the Highlands of Scotland. Her most recent books are *Puppetry in Dementia Care: Connecting through Creativity and Joy* (2013) and *A Creative Toolkit for Communication in Dementia Care* (2016) both published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers.





## Svetlana Smirnova

### Metaphorical Dolls in Psychological Correction and Psychotherapy

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*Professional paper*

**Abstract:** The article presents the theoretical and practical aspects of work with the metaphorical image of a doll at therapeutic art sessions. The doll is not born by itself: it is created by a person based on the current level of their mental energy. It finds “life” through creative imagination and the will of its creator. How much is invested, how deeply you can plunge into the world of reality and fantasy of being a client, verbalizing the product of creativity and playing the image of the doll through a metaphor.

**Key words:** metaphorical doll, metaphor, ethnoculture, art therapy, mental representation, positive psychotherapy

The following terms are used in the article:

- Author's dolls and puppets<sup>13</sup> – metaphorical dolls in art therapy.
- Psychocorrection – assistance for a mentally healthy person who has psychological or behavioral problems and isn't personally able to resolve them. It's a process of healing and inspiring development. Psychotherapy is a more clinical experience.
- Ethno-puppet therapy – psychological correction and psychotherapy with puppets of various ethnicities, created both by the client at the art-therapy session, and through contemplation of finished works. We use a wide range and wealth of patterns, techniques, forms and their cultural bases when we are making metaphorical dolls and puppets of different ethnic groups. We study cultural aspects, thereby expanding the horizons of knowledge about human nature.

A metaphorical doll – an anthropo- and zoomorphic character made or contemplated by the client. It is able to be a substitute for a person

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13 In Russian there is one word (*kukla*) for doll and puppet.

in a nominally playful form, acting as a result of a psycho correctional or psychotherapeutic session. A metaphorical doll is a man-made image, like a metaphor in which the artist – puppeteer and / or spectator, replay their inner psychological comedies, tragedies and other emotional genres, life plots – real and desired – and integrate them into a psychological structure.

The multifaceted and ambiguous nature of the concepts is at the heart of creating a metaphor that a person tries to operate. The client reflects a multifaceted, extra-linguistic structure of his inner “self” through the doll. Aristotle wrote: “... the ability to organize a good metaphor is the ability to recognize the similarity” (Meerovich, 2016).

The client as the creator himself in contact with the craft of puppetry lives at his own unique pace and rhythm of self-knowledge, comprehending what he has gone through, his skills, knowledge and desires at this moment in his life. He moves to understand the true motives and goals of his being, gradually and smoothly. A person begins to feel through the response of emotions that the metaphorical doll evokes, contemplating dolls at the exhibition, in the gallery, even on the Internet. Arutyunova N.D. wrote in her book *Metaphor and Discourse / Metaphor Theories*: “Metaphor was increasingly seen as the key to understanding the foundations of thinking and the processes of creating a vision of the world, its universal image: a person does not resemble it, he creates it” (Arutyunova, 1990).

Looking at (contemplating) the image of a doll, a person can feel and realize the dynamics of the emotional sphere of the current moment, which allows us to state – the image of the metaphorical doll is not only a frozen moment, but also movement, active dynamics in the imagination of the viewer or the author of the work. At the same time, emotions may be different from what they were before. A person involuntarily begins to look inside himself in contact with the dolls. A doll is like a window into the magical, mysterious world of individual self-expression and perception of the inner “self”. Puppet art has a unique dynamic and the special rhythm of the inner emotional life. It can be confirmed by the words of B. Brecht: “People enjoy life in art”. Above all pleasure is through the full palette of the emotional world of man.

A person grows up, but a doll as an image, a doll as an allegory, a doll as a work of art, a doll as a toy continues to live next to him, having as

it were two faces: one is addressed to the cherished world of childhood, and the other is reminiscent of pseudo-life and twinning in the context of duality (Smirnova, 2000). Perhaps that is why we hold a special, if not always conscious, attitude towards the dolls. This attitude is born of the irresistible and sometimes frightening, inexplicable but effective and attractive, metaphorical force emanating from them (Morozov, 2011).

The doll helps the person to “animate” the thing, to get familiar with the doll. It helps the process of actualization and development of “self”, its gaining and becoming. In this aspect, it is the process of mental representation – the key concept of cognitive science, referring to the process of representation of the world in the person’s head.

We use a wide range and richness of pattern, technology, form and cultural content when making metaphorical dolls from different ethnic groups. As before, in ancient times, we can make a doll from what is close to us – which could be natural materials, junk or specialist materials, and the tools of puppet-makers and sculptors.

The metaphorical doll allows a corrective influence to be applied to behavioral aspects of a person faced with various psychological difficulties. The doll heals and inspires the client through activation of resources (Tatarinceva, 2007). This allows him/her to harmonize their psycho-emotional state and thereby lead them along the path of “inspiring development” of their ability to know themselves and self-express. The doll works with different fears, difficulties with relatives (family conflicts) and at work (business communication), and the consequences of stressful situations in a person’s life. It is an excellent tool for the development of creativity, in both children and adults. The doll acts as a materialized ideal, and as part of person’s own self”, the embodied unconscious, in which hidden desires and intentions are embodied. Its creation in reality is determined by individual-personal attitudes and preferences, and by the rules of the social environment. K.G. Jung wrote in his book *Man and Symbols*: “Representations that are inaccessible to pure reason arise before the soul when the soul begins to understand the symbol” (Jung, 1997). The doll can be viewed not as a simple symbol, but as a number of symbols, as a mirror image of the human world in different emotional moments of being. In this aspect, the doll enables an interesting and useful journey into the innermost depths of one’s soul.

The process of using the image of a metaphorical doll takes place in two different areas:

1. a) the creation of a doll;  
b) the analysis of the created work and art-therapeutic & psychotherapeutic work with a created product (a metaphorical doll);
2. a) the search for finished works, contemplation and observation (exhibitions, specialist books and others ...);  
b) analysis of the selected work (the finished maker's doll, which inspired an emotional response from the client) and art-therapeutic, psychotherapeutic work with the created product (a metaphorical doll).

The creation of the doll begins with the designation of the metaphor with which a person associates himself, thereby denoting the theme of the image. The concept of the image in this case is viewed as a subjective reflection of the inner self. The subjectivity of the image includes the personal choice of the client (the puppet creator) or the client (the puppeteer), the dependence of a metaphorical image on their needs, goals, tasks, motives, attitudes, emotions, current mental states, and also the conditions provoking them. In the metaphorical image of a doll, the maker's subjectively transformed experience in his real and unique emotional connections with the past, present, and (possibly) view of the future, are fixed. The client lives through emotions, insights and catharsis at all the stages of creating the doll. The image of the doll arises as a result of the inner contact of the objective and subjective flows of the client's attitude. In the image of a metaphorical doll, the main content of someone's inner world is concentrated at the present moment of their life. The process of creating a doll is already a healing act: the place of emotions from the past or the future in the ecological flow of the work process (therapy with creativity). Immersion in the process of the creative act of making dolls relaxes children and adults, who are rather gently and naturally freed from emotional "clamps", and accumulated energy (Zhuravlyov, 2011). Looked at this way, it can be considered as a holistic approach in art therapy.

The creation of small details using the hands leads to the development of fine motor skills (develops "manual intelligence"), activation of creative thinking, and development of imagination, and also contributes to the development of perseverance and concentration of attention. In the process of working, the client can keep a record in an observational diary, fixing

those feelings and sensations that arise while working physically. This stage can be seen as a bodily-oriented perception of themselves by the client.

This stage can be considered as diagnostic and at the same time therapeutic.

Contemplation and observation:

- a) attending specialist exhibitions;
- b) review of specialist magazines, catalogues and books with photos and descriptions of puppets.

If they are able to, the client can use photography, and record in an observational diary their emotional response to what they have seen. Insights are possible. For each of us, the doll categorizes and objectifies some part of the personality of the viewer in contact with it. Everyone will see in the explored image or find in the “mass” of works presented, things that will vitalize and shake them up emotionally.

After that we provide psychotherapeutic work with a created piece of work – with a metaphorical doll.

The created metaphorical image of a doll plays the role of an object, onto which the instinctive energy of a person is shifted: a person attributes his own thoughts, feelings and behavior to the doll, which makes it easier to load it with accumulated emotions and know what he is feeling. A person can easily tell a doll what he shies from or is embarrassed to tell others. Inefficient strategies of behavior change to more efficient ones at the subconscious level. Analysis of the doll’s image allows the activation of natural feeling – self-awareness of certain features of one’s personality, the search for and disclosure of internal energy and emotional resources. A tendency towards psychosomatic diseases is reduced, and in some cases the process is accomplished through positive therapeutic reflection. There is an almost natural harmonization of internal psychological processes. The choice of the form of image is based on the response and inner needs of the person’s own soul. As practice shows, it is often an unconscious process that provokes the subconscious.

What happens here? Some parts of the inner self of a person are forced out of consciousness for some reason. In this way a doll can provoke an emotion for a person: joy, sadness, tenderness etc. The doll plays the role of a conductor between the subconscious and conscious and self-sufficiency of society in this case.

If a client creates a metaphorical doll, the analysis begins with the sensations at the time of making the creative product (a metaphorical doll), including bodily sensations (from previously recorded notes in the observational diary). Next, there is the analysis of feelings and emotions from the image as a whole, writing a story or a fairy tale. Then, playing the story in the desired version for the client, through the image of the doll, happens.

When we use a variety of ways of looking at the exhibition (a real exhibition, specialist books, albums, catalogues or project maps), analysis of feelings of emotion, insight at the time of first contact, and “animation” of the image in this category happen.

I recommend the psychologist to ask the client the following questions:

- Is this doll’s image about you? – I recommend the client to answer with a metaphor.

- What could this doll tell you? – I recommend the client to answer with a metaphor as well.

Previously recorded notes in the observational diary help in this case.

The construction and content of the metaphorical image of a doll, producing a sensual and rational connection, activates the sensory-perceptual and emotional imagination of the client, thereby contributing to a new and deeper understanding of the essence of the current state, situation, and phenomena of the surrounding emotional world of the inner self.

Let me give you another version of working with the finished image of a metaphorical doll. The client is given the task of photographing the doll he has created. He prepares a background and decorative design, on which he will take pictures. It’s like a scene, or rather, scenery for representing his feelings through the image he has created of a metaphorical doll, only within the dynamics of the frame. He photographs the doll, changing the pose after each shot. Then an animation technique is applied. The illusion of the doll’s movement occurs when the photos received are reproduced with the dynamics of changes in poses. Thus, animation allows the client to create the effect of “revitalizing” the metaphorical doll, using motionless objects. Mental processes are started at the level of visual and auditory channels. Against this background, the subconscious can bring out awareness of the client’s problems, which is resolved with the participation of a psychologist through the creative production of the

metaphorical doll. The playful effect of using the technology of animation made it possible to “revive” or “animate” the image of the metaphorical doll and allowed the client to enter into an internal dialogue, finding new possibilities for themselves, developing and expanding horizons, and finding a variety of new scenarios for better behaviour.

What does interaction with the metaphorical doll give to the client? The doll as an intermediary between the client and the psychologist (art therapist) is an excellent tool in art-therapy if you accompany the client and create an art-therapeutic environment during the psychotherapeutic session.

This interaction:

- Enriches the person’s inner world (development of the ability to see a new one – sensual contact with the environment and positioning oneself in this space);
- Develops “manual intellect” (fine motor skills and dexterity);
- Reveals creative potential and capacity for imaginative thinking (transforming vision, quantitative analysis, and analytical perception);
- Teaches concentration of attention and fills with new emotions and energy resources (increasing self-esteem, opening new opportunities for creating real-life scenarios) by interacting with the metaphorical doll.

The metaphorical doll as a psychological phenomenon reflects the level of development of the verbal imagination, in which the client can independently create metaphorical doll images from various materials, and interpret complex and simple contexts of the metaphorical image. Metaphor can sometimes be the only bridge between physical and mental health.

Let me end with a passage from Julia Cameron’s book *The Vein of Gold*: puppet artist Elinor Peace Bailey writes, “Why does the image of a human figure, however bizarre it may be, cause in people the desire to possess it? What is its magic that fascinates so many people? It is not easy to answer these questions. Many collectors say that dolls remind them of their childhood. Dolls awaken fantasy. Dolls allow you to invoke divine powers and become a blessing for families who are able to accept them. Since the beginning of time, people have depicted the abstract in simple form and endowed it with a healing and enlightening power. There is



a subconscious inner child called ‘ku’ in the Hawaiian religion Kuna. If we do not keep in touch with him, our rational mind comes to the fore, manages everything, and our prayers, appeals and desires do not reach the Higher Self. We already know that you can attract and bring the desired changes to your life with the help of words. Dolls are also able to fulfill our desires and dreams. If anything is missing, their manufacture will help you to fill the gap” (Cameron, 2015, 127).

Here is an example of practical work.



The client is a woman (66 years old). The purpose of the work is to deal with fears (of old age or death). The theme of the metaphorical doll is “Art-angel is my helper”. The client was passive at the beginning of the work, afraid of the technical difficulty of making (in the client’s words: “Scary, I cannot manage, my hands won’t work in that way, I’m an old one already”). As she worked, her interest increased, and her confidence in her ability to create increased too. A positive moment came when the client was surprised by what she had created and enthusiastically admired. The

realisation came that you can learn new things, discover interesting new areas of work, and age is not a hindrance.

The client created more work (one piece of work in the presence of a psychologist, the rest herself, as a homework assignment).



*Translated by Larisa Telnova and Meg Amsden*

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Svetlana Smirnova  
**Центр социально-психологических  
услуг "Доверие"** г. Люберцы  
Московской области, Россия / Center  
for social and psychological services  
"Doverie"  
Lyubercy  
Moscow region  
Russia  
[http://www.b17.ru/se\\_smirnova/?prt=info111](http://www.b17.ru/se_smirnova/?prt=info111), [s.e.smirnova@mail.ru](mailto:s.e.smirnova@mail.ru)

Svetlana Smirnova is a psychologist, specialist in adult education, art-therapist. Sphere of professional activity:

- Individual and group psychological counseling, art-therapy at the Psychological Museum in Lyubercy, Moscow region.
- Head of the art laboratory "Self-knowledge! Creative self-expression and self-realization!" at the Lyubercy Museum of Psychology.
- Participant of charitable creative workshops for oncological clients and volunteers of the project "OPORA."
- Member of the Russian Therapeutic Art Association.
- Member of the Society of Positive Dynamic Psychotherapists.
- Deputy Chairman of the Psychologists Association in Moscow Region.

Antje Wegener  
Practical Links to Art and Sciences  
Therapeutic Puppetry in Germany

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*Professional paper*

**Abstract:** This paper tries to explain some practical experiences, principles and effects of puppetry, especially therapeutic puppetry. For that purpose the author will resort to some basics of art and related sciences. She wants to lift the curtain for a little look at the miracle that is the puppet. To develop methods and practice it may be helpful to combine some findings and conclusions. A short section on the German practice of therapeutic puppetry opens the paper.

**Keywords:** therapeutic puppetry, puppet theatre, playing agreement, trauma-pedagogy, neurobiology, fairy-tale

### **Therapeutic puppeteers in Germany**

I work as a freelance therapeutic puppeteer in Halle/Saale. I have never lost my fascination for the puppet's ability to open doors and set things in motion just by playing. It is truly a little bit like magic...

As everywhere in the world many German puppeteers, teachers, and psychologists who are interested in puppets use them for healing or social purposes. In the DGTP, our union, you can find them all. We want to promote therapeutic puppetry, network and go further with the methods.

As freelancers, there are occupational and speech therapists, psychologists and non-medical practitioners using puppets. They may be paid by the health fund. The other possibility is a contract with the youth welfare office or private clients.

Employed puppet therapists work in multi-disciplinary clinical teams. They use therapeutic puppetry for diagnostics, improving self-confidence and initial parental work. Social workers in day care for difficult children, people with dementia, or mentally ill adults use therapeutic puppetry as well. But all together therapeutic puppetry is, as yet, little known in Germany.

I do therapeutic puppetry with children in difficult situations involving mentally ill or addicted parents, divorce, grieving, being a foster child, migration, trauma etc. I have a contract with the youth welfare office and what I offer moves between social pedagogy, counseling and psychotherapy. I use puppets, adopting the methods developed by the Swiss, Käthy Wüthrich and Klaus Harter, and the German, Gudrun Gauda. It is in-depth psychology based on the archetypes and the theory of lifelong individuation by C.G. Jung.

The method works with archetypal hand glove puppets and symbolic props on an improvised ironing board or table-stage. Hereby the child or client is the director and creates a story. I help them to get their ideas on the stage, but without an audience. We are just playing together for this moment like children's role play.

Afterwards I take photographs of the most important scenes, take note of my emotions and transferences and attempt an interpretation of the symbols.

The structure of a playing session is very simple but important: We have one hour, two people and three rules. These rules are:

- Puppets can do and say anything, even things we humans are not able or allowed to.
- We don't hurt each other and don't destroy things because then there would be no more playing.
- Both of us can say "STOP" if there is something wrong or unclear or if we are tired. Then we would lay the puppets down, have a break, talk and then start playing again.

The standard beginning is the so called "Dreierdynamik", Dynamic of three: to choose three props, three puppets, and thirdly: to build a set, where these figures could meet. I am flexible with these conditions because the main goal is to get the client involved in the play and to really stage a story.

This structure and the rigorously kept promise that the client is the leader throughout the story establishes a safe room – a basis for free thinking, playing, growing, healing.

I am not the teacher. I am the assistant with appropriate materials, I am the companion who shares the experience, I am the escort on the client's way. Of course I am older and wiser than a child, but I only offer my view and ideas as ones alongside other possibilities.

Often I am surprised by the wisdom and accuracy of the children's solutions. And so are they!

Other methods like working with fairy-tales, fantasy journeys, drawing and of course making their own puppets complete the sessions.

Usually we have one hour a week over a whole year and this is ideal for working on the process.

We know many things without being conscious of them. We use them, and everything seems to be clear. But when we are asked we can hardly explain them: "Children will play", "The Puppet is a powerful miracle", "Art is free and human" – sure, but why? If you don't just want to adore the wonder of puppetry but want to use it as a craft, you must catch the pieces of the puzzle and explore their outlines.

For Therapeutic Puppetry I found them in performing art, science, dramaturgy, semiotics, culture theory, pedagogy, play science, developmental psychology, attachment theory, archetypal images and individuation by C.G. Jung, studies and interpretations of fairy-tales, neurobiology,

trauma-pedagogy, systemic and other therapeutic approaches and last but not least my personal study of behavior and relationships.

### **Performing arts**

Artists know about storytelling in pictures: You can find an image for every unthinkable circumstance. If it is well designed, this image is authentically, truly felt internally. Puppetry sets it at a safe external distance. These are ideas to work with: *Safety* and *real emotions* are needed for therapeutic change. The term “embodiment” is used in this field.

For me as a theatre scientist, puppet theatre is a form of performing art. As with every artform it is communication about existential human themes by symbols and metaphors. The artist offers a designed product, the recipient constructively “reads” it, making their own sense of it. The stage presents an exposed place for an agreement between the artist and the audience: something meaningful will be shown there. Nothing will harm the audience, but everything is possible on stage. A special semiotic language is created through the *animated object, the puppet*. The puppet can be an art object itself. But at its heart is the animation of inanimate material claiming it to be human. It is the highest masterpiece to present material as if it were alive. Puppet theatre creates different levels of meaning: the animated object itself (as subject and/ or object), the narration and behavior of the character, the relationship between player and character.

Therapeutic puppetry uses the puppet when it is moved more as a mask, as a material shield, like a toy. An audience is not required. That’s why the art of animation is not our task. But we also use its physicality and value.

Or, in another way: the client is the puppet designer, the actor, the director and his own audience. He produces images full of individual meaning and receives them himself.

### **Play theory**

Therapeutic puppetry uses play as a *low-level* door-opener: families are often suspicious of outsiders, youth welfare officers, critical pedagogues and so on. I invite the child (or later even the mother) to play: one hour out of time like an island; nothing can be done wrong, extraordinary

materials are tempting, fun is included. A few sessions later I invite the parents to have a look at what their remarkable child has been enacting. With enthusiasm I can tell them the motives of the stories and show photos (which I agreed with the child before): parents can keep their pride and not feel blamed, especially if the talk is about their family. But surely the parents can read the message in the scenario more clearly than I can. Often they get another view of their child: there is no confrontation because they are just playing. They are reminded of their own childhood and their high hopes when becoming parents. The play establishes an unthreatening *meta-level* to approach intimate family problems. Parents are thawing and ask: "What can we do?" – and that is the start of a working relationship.

Playing is the *natural child's way to integrate phenomena* of the outer objective world into their uncluttered brain. After birth, nerve structures are there but blank. An individual system of images and cognition grows by sensing and acting and getting mirror reactions from others. This gets close to concept formation and speech acquisition. Playing is learning by transforming the outer world under emotional evaluation into consistent psychological structures. Ability to reason slowly comes at the age of 7 and it does not replace playing. Play is not just a nice amusement without any goal, it is the basic human way of learning and becoming capable of acting.

And for young children it is the *only* way of expressing and understanding. It is determined by egocentric thinking and animism. This perfectly fits puppetry.

Puppet playing and story improvising bring information about the child's view and have a direct influence on its future vision of life.

Puppetry is a laboratory. Role playing consists of acting as-if in a safe room with fewer consequences. Social learning through models is possible, as well as emotional relief. Fantasy and emotions fire and focus attention.

Acted content is *symbolized* – intensified by the created expression of the puppets. Here is another difference from theatre. A theatre puppet is made for this production only. It is constructed in a special manner according to theatrical standards. The therapeutic puppet plays different characters, it is a real actor. Its archetypal look is animated into the



concrete individual character of a puppet. And this puppet is the object or subject we discuss: what is he like? Why? Every time he appears? What does he want? This meta-level of talking is a basic aspect of play situations and allows for therapeutic conversation.

Choosing puppets is making real inner images or ideas. Some days the father looks like a king, on other days like a thief or a ghost – the client chooses different puppets which fit that moment. You can even take these as parts of one personality. In other ways the same puppet can stand for different characters: My “Grandma” has been a witch too...

Later we can imagine what to do with the witch and find a solution – always under the cover of a played-out story. Here the puppet as a substitute gets its task. We don’t have to leave that toy-material shelter but we still do hard work: We struggle, we rescue, we find treasure, we make love, we punish.

Puppets build a safe platform for complicated themes. The world of play is not dangerous and not random, but liberating and constructive – just human structured.

### Trauma-pedagogy

In the last few years trauma therapy has paid more attention to the stabilization of the client rather than on confrontation as the main goal. This stabilization can be done by everyone engaged, empathizing and aware. Therefore trauma-pedagogy spreads the knowledge of a few important points:

- Makes the difference between past and present clear and perceptible. Be HERE and NOW with every cell. *Physical actions and concentrating tasks are useful. LIVE PERFORMANCE.*
- Explains to the brain what has happened to feelings and thought in a time of shock and suffering. *Meta-level speaking and structures are useful. REFLECTION, SETTING.*
- Creates a distance between events. *Pictures and humor are useful. ART SEMIOTICS.*
- Gives the client the control back which he lost in a time of powerlessness. Makes a safe place and gives him the ability to decide.

*Stage: Get in, get out is self-controlled. Transparency and visible actions are useful. DIRECTION.*

- Gives a foundation when thinking deeply. Get feet on the ground. *Construction and development of material objects is useful. STAGING.*
- Gives an active example of a predictable and truthful relationship. *Security, attention and fairness are useful. COMPANIONSHIP.*
- The brain cannot make an emotional difference between memory and imagination. New connections allow old floating pictures to be anchored. *Actively self-made images combined with positive emotions are useful. PLAYING.*
- Creates new experiences alongside older ones. *New matters, fantasy, and personal narrations are useful. STORY and SENSE.*

Add up the *useful facts* and you have PUPPETRY!

### **Attachment theory**

Today the importance of the primal trust developed by good early child care is commonly known. Complete ego development, behavioral strategies and personal relationships are based on the first year(s) of one's life. But the important message is: if you have developed an attachment disorder because of anything lacking in your early life, you are not lost. It can be nourished by other people and later in life too.

The therapist as a playing tutor can fulfill the essential attachment needs. Every playing agreement is based on trust: We come together to play, no matter who you are, where you come from or what has happened to you. While establishing an authentic playing relationship you have trust, safety and fairness. You are in contact immediately. It is an ethical duty not to misuse this.

*Prominent signs of the offer of a secure attachment are:*

- Sensitivity to the needs of the other, correct interpretation and prompt, appropriate implementation. You are welcome just by being you, without any conditions.
- Consistency of reaction feeds the feeling that someone hears you and cares. You can trust. You can hope. You can build on that.

In a successful team of players you always have to look out for the needs of others, be close to each other, give trust. You are welcome just as

you are, just for being there, your wish is not questioned – like when you are a baby. Playing allows the therapist to fulfill every wish: everything is possible, everything is immediate. She gives the client what he needs at that moment; understanding, privacy, knowhow, and solidarity; and performs the client-inspired scenes by creating and acting so that he has an impressive experience.

So this special playing structure accomplishes important relationship work. It is a little bit like feeding. Adults as well as children can accept this from a strange person under the premise of play.

- Somebody will only start to explore if his system of attachment is relaxed, if he feels safe and well nourished. He can become Columbus if he feels securely anchored.

Finishing a puppet play, the client gets the feeling of complete acceptance, of a do-able world full of possibilities waiting for him. This experience often is new to the player and would hardly be experienced by him in his daily life. So on leaving the playing room, the client has the greatest self-confidence in taking this feeling out into the real world.

### **Neurobiology. Enthusiasm**

Tomography and messenger chemistry nowadays better explain our common experiences of learning.

Even the progressive educators at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century knew that the brain is more than a container of facts and that successful learning follows enthusiasms. For example: The pupil has no idea of the material he has learnt one week after the test but he knows all the scores of his favorite team for the last five years... Now photos of multiplying synapses do exist. They can prove that brain structures grow as a result of enthusiasm! Real enthusiasm is the most important condition for learning, not just a tasty morsel for Pavlov's dog.

Emotions are the filter of the other regions of the brain: memories, imaging, thinking, consciousness (or unconsciousness), voluntary and involuntary functions, reflexes, behavioral impulses, learning. Emotional evaluation comes from the survival layer and therefore it is the strongest.

Puppetry fires emotions. We are awake, we are ready to listen, to watch, to learn if a puppet calls for attention. By the way: Herein lies a great danger if puppets are misapplied!

If we are feeling good playing, we don't need to say: attention please! We have focus and all antennae are receiving. Survival is secured and so is curiosity, and the gap-filling preference of our human brains starts to work. We are searching for solutions and sense. We get gratification which is a good feeling, again created by chemical messengers.

So puppetry is chemistry and multiplies cells in the end. It is an important argument for all ambitious school parents: puppetry and storytelling are catalysts for children's brain development.

### **Fairy-tale studies. Dramaturgy**

My experiences tell me that most improvised stories show a *dramaturgical structure* too:

- *Starting up/setting*: Where does the story begin? Who is there and what character has he got? What does he usually do?
- *Further* and further, on and on...
- *Who else is coming?* What can be *done with the props*?
- *What happens?* A sudden great change, an unavoidable consequence, a beloved never-changing paradise, an amazing metamorphosis...
- What does *the end* look like?

Every one of these points needs a decision by the director-client. He makes it, he watches it, he changes or accepts it. There is a guiding line for free individual narration. Inner disorder leads to a plot. Possibilities are boundless but not random in dramaturgy.

The most highly identifying character usually refers to the *hero of a fairy-tale*. He suffers or has to meet a task, or he is the most important person but unhappy. If he gets on his way, he has the chance to win everything. If he moves on, there will be help. There will be worse catastrophes, but hope in every little light too. It seems those narrative structures are archetypal all over the world and for all times. They seem to "lie in our genes". And so does our ability to self-heal: If we are in motion, change becomes possible.

Fairy-tales, well known or newly created, are talented emotion tamers and life counselors in this way. Fairy-tales are not logical but their special rules make *sense*.

Hereby they touch central tenets of Psychotherapy.

- The highest level of human and individual searching is for *meaning*. We accept what makes sense to us, we construct sense, we get satisfaction from a meaningful life, sense motivates us. Storytelling is an easy archetypal sense-finder. Puppetry goes further by embodying.
  - Puppetry provides projective materials for diagnostics or in-depth psychology.
  - To integrate past experiences and different parts of one person-ality, puppetry provides emotional symbolic actions and different puppet characters.
  - Emotional maturing and structural integration of one's self-image will direct one's behavior, control disorders or relationship conflicts.
1. Puppetry is a fruitful foundation of action and conversation, encompassing personal resources.
  2. In puppetry, you see that what is done can also be done in another way. What has been set down can be replaced. Bad luck touched you, but you are more than that: you are the director who can transform experience, you act in agency.

My practice as a therapeutic puppeteer proves and modifies these condensed items above. Puppetry proves its worth in healing and changing views and behavior. My work leaves me satisfied and curious, being presented with stories and a new thirst for knowledge.

For general reading I can recommend the following standard works in different editions and languages: Kast, Verena: *The Dynamic of symbols: Fundamentals of Jungian Psychotherapy*; Lüthi, Max: *The European folktale: Form and nature*; Bettelheim, Bruno: *The uses of enchantment: The meaning and importance of fairy tales*; Hüther, Gerald: *The compassionate brain: A revolutionary Guide to developing your intelligence to its full potential*; Brisch, Karl-Heinz: *Treating attachment disorders: From Theory to therapy*; Piaget, Jean: *The psychology of the child*; Vygotsky, Lev S.: *Mind in society*.

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Photo by Ute Gebhardt.

Antje Wegener  
 Kreatives Puppenatelier -  
 Therapeutisches Figurenspiel  
 Kurt-Tucholsky-Str. 4  
 06110 Halle/Saale  
 Germany  
[www.puppenspiel-therapie-halle.de](http://www.puppenspiel-therapie-halle.de)  
[www.dgtp.de](http://www.dgtp.de)  
[kontakt@puppenspiel-therapie-halle.de](mailto:kontakt@puppenspiel-therapie-halle.de)

Antje Wegener has worked freelance as a puppet therapist for youth welfare or private clients for five years now. She works with children of mentally ill parents, with foster children and on trauma issues. She studied theatre sciences at Humboldt University Berlin and specialized in puppet theatre dramaturgy and special needs education. Alongside working for 20 years in a mobility aid shop, she prepared for her intended career as a puppet therapist. She has a diploma from the Institute of Creation and Communication at Frankfurt/M. as a therapeutic puppeteer and a diploma from the Trauma Pedagogy Society of Germany (DeGPT/ BAG-TP). She is a member of the UNIMA EDT Commission and DGTP.



## Andrea Markovits Puppet Therapy and Traumatic Memory in Post-dictatorship Chile

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*Review paper*

**Abstract:** The Puppet Therapy (Muñecoterapia) methodology has been applied by the *Puppets in Transit* company in projects with PRAIS (Chile's Reparation and Integral Health Attention Plan) users, as well as in open workshops organized by the company itself, with financial support from the Chilean National Culture and Arts Fund FONDART (2015 and 2017). In these reparation, memory and human rights processes, the participants share the experience of being victims of State terrorism, or families of the detained and disappeared, during the Chilean civil-military dictatorship (1973-1990). The therapeutic process employs a memory-activating and collective intervention that aims to repair social connection, promote intergenerational dialogue, while supporting transmission of memories that, due to their traumatic nature, are characterized by silence and fragmentation inside the families themselves. By constructing a puppet, as a human metaphor, the puppet's therapeutic and symbolic potential – as an expressive and mediating object – is accentuated in order to stimulate personal and creative work while, at the same time, collective dialogue is generated, culminating in the performative processing of trauma memories. This methodology has been shown to have a high impact on audiences, and is effective as a complementary expressive therapy, within the ambit of mental health therapies.

**Key words:** puppet therapy, Puppets in Transit, trauma, puppets and memory, memory, transgenerational damage



We live within the discursive act. But we cannot presume that the verbal is the only matrix through which we can conceive the articulation and conduct of the intellect (Steiner, 2003, 13).



Scene from “Concierto para la Paz”. Photo: Puppets in Transit.

*Can puppets help to integrate and elaborate  
the traumatic memories of political violence  
survivors and victims’ families?*

### **“Concierto para la Paz” (Concert for Peace): narrating the un-narratable**

The artistic and social intervention work with Puppets and Memory had its genesis in “Concierto para la Paz” (Concert for Peace), a silent puppet and object theatre production for adult audiences, premiered in Israel in 2012. This production was inspired by and located in the terrains of the Holocaust and Latin American military dictatorships, as well as in the intrinsic themes of evil, persecution, intolerance and the indelible marks these have left on future generations: “transgenerational damage”, understood as the reproduction of the traumatic burden in later generations (Sandoval et al, 2012).

The central objective of this puppet theatre work was the idea of narrating the un-narratable through images, to create as far as possible a universal account of pain. Yet, it was the audience impact, both in Israel and Chile, that triggered the necessity to create Puppet and Memory workshops in Chile, understanding both the puppet’s intrinsic power as an expressive object that mobilizes emotions and activates memory, and

because we saw the empathy and connection that this moving material created in the audiences.



Scene from “Concierto para la Paz”. Photo: Puppets in Transit.

Within the play, when we want to narrate the un-narratable we become mute, there is no bridge that leads us to the word, grammar has died, we have no adjectives nor verbs, the only thing we have left is a silent image. Silence is transformed, pain is cross-dressed into material brought alive in the puppets (characters). Silence installs itself in the puppets’ movements and recovers its voice, words install themselves in the images, interspersed with pauses, waiting and breathing. The production’s storyline becomes latent. The puppet installed in the middle of the stage is breathing agitatedly because someone is outside the house, this someone is coming for her, she has done nothing, but this is enough for the dictatorship. Orwellianly, they are coming for her. It is not possible to relate that fear through spoken word. Only the puppet, through its breathing and its numb body of wood and foam, reveals to us that the tragedy has begun.

The awareness, empathy and identification that the play’s various scenes and images provoked in audiences was the template for the Puppet and Memory workshops. Our observations showed the puppet theatre work “Concierto para la Paz” successfully attempted to narrate what was un-narratable. The unspeakable was able to be expressed and recognized through the puppet’s visual and theatrical language. The puppet transformed into a “word that acts” (Kartun, 2003).



Scene from “Concierto para la Paz”. Photo: Puppets in Transit.

### **The research process: from puppet theatre to *Puppets in Transit* to Puppet Therapy**

*It's strange that the only way to  
communicate horror is through beauty.*  
(Peter Schumann)

In the process of adapting and remounting “Concierto para la Paz” in Chile, we contacted Beatriz Bataszew, psychologist and ex political prisoner of the *Venda Sexy*<sup>14</sup> (Sexy Blindfold) Torture Centre, who was detained by DINA<sup>15</sup> agents in 1973. She met with the *Puppets in Transit* team to guide them through the more psychological phase of the puppet research process. The aim was that, based on her experiences of detention, imprisonment and torture, our puppets could give the most faithful interpretation of this reality. During one of the rehearsals, Beatriz had to leave the room. She became very emotional, and commented to the group: “I’m moved, what happened is that when I looked at the puppet, what made the most impact on me was her breathing, because it reflects so effectively

<sup>14</sup> DINA detention centre, given this name because of the sexual nature of the torture carried out there.

<sup>15</sup> From 1973 to 1977, the National Intelligence Directorate, known as DINA, was the secret police arm of the Pinochet-led military dictatorship, responsible for numerous cases of political infiltration and human rights violations (murder, kidnapping, rape, torture and disappearance).

that anxiety that you experience in situations where you have absolutely no control and don't know what's going to happen to you... you connect to the puppet, the puppet gives you a certain freedom, because it doesn't speak, it doesn't interpret, it's like neutral and so you can install yourself completely in her and, in the end, you end up performing the play" (Bataszew, 2014).

When we wanted to transfer this process into the format of the "Puppets and Memory" artistic reparatory workshops, company members in charge of pedagogy and puppeteers (Andrea Markovits and Polo Fernández) knew that the people who would participate in the workshops had lived through, and were still living, complex individual and collective trauma like the disappearance of family members.

One of the aspects of the word disappearance that most makes us freeze is the fact that... something like this is called a technique. The word belies a certain operative mode that demands, in order to maintain its status of technique, being conceived in its diverse elements, as well as in the flawless agency of these elements (Douailler in Richard, 2000, 99).

Other aspects to consider were participants' experiences of torture, State political violence, impunity, and the absence of truth and justice in Chile extending for more than 40 years in never-ending court cases. Added to this, was the fact that traditional therapies have not been effective for victims or, in many cases, they have had no access to specialized attention, nor less to reparation. As is stated in the book *Prevention of trans-generational damage*: "Re-traumatization is a sub-product of impunity and is the means by which traumatic memory is periodically reactivated in the collective unconscious, making the acts of the past acquire a real existence as acts of the present..." (Sandoval et al, 2012, 24).

Nevertheless, all this was an opportunity and a challenge that involved a risk: to turn this aesthetic and communicational experience into a collective and creative process that would mobilize memory towards group listening and containment.

The "Puppets and Memory" puppet therapy project sought to research further about psychosocial reparation through the arts, for victims of political violence, with an innovative approach through puppet theatre. This intervention, through the representation of non-integrated aspects of the traumatic experience, aimed to re-elaborate this experience in a context

of interpersonal and intergenerational dialogue. The experiences were characterized as interventions through puppet theatre, where the participants would carry out work involving forward-looking, representation and symbolization through the puppets. It would be possible to return to the traumatic experiences from the safe space offered by the puppet, as a mobilizing agent, promoting individual as well as group resignification, through collective dialogue with other people who have lived through similar experiences or have been affected transgenerationally by human rights violations.



Scene from “Concierto para la Paz”. Photo: Puppets in Transit.

### **The two workshop projects**

The interventions financed by the Chilean Culture and Arts Ministry, were carried out in two projects. The first one, in 2015, was titled “Puppets and Memory: The gesture of theatrical reparation” and was divided into two workshops: one in Villa Grimaldi<sup>16</sup>, and the second in the Mem-

<sup>16</sup> Villa Grimaldi or ex Terranova Barracks was an emblematic detention and torture centre during the Chilean military dictatorship, now converted into a memory site named Villa Grimaldi Peace Park, whose objective is to promote and defend human rights, as well as conserving the centre’s historic memory. See [www.villagrimaldi.cl](http://www.villagrimaldi.cl)

ory and Human Rights Museum<sup>17</sup>, both in Santiago, the Chilean capital. The second project, called “Aesthetics for Memory and Transgenerational Damage”, was implemented in 2017 in two places in the south of Chile: in the PRAIS program centre in Concepción, and in the Community Centre of the nearby town of Lota. It is important to mention that both these cities – Concepción and Lota – were highly affected by the civil-military repression; direct family members, the next generations and the collective imagination were all victims. In both projects, it was observed that the puppet became an effective tool allowing participants to represent, symbolize and process the damage and the traumatic experiences that, in some cases, had never been treated.

The mental health teams that supported these activities (psychologist, doctor and social worker) agreed that the group experience of working with puppets, in a playful and symbolic way, allowed many participants to be able to transfer their traumatic experiences to the object, in ways that had not been possible to achieve through individual therapy.

### **Methodology: the silent process of creating and building puppets**

In both projects, silence was presented to the group as a work methodology. Silence was not imposed, but rather proposed. Silence is a key narrative resource, a language and aesthetic experience that allowed workshop participants to submerge themselves in the oneiric memory of the damage, re-symbolizing these memories in order to give new meaning to the trauma, often made invisible and annulled within the family memory and, in this way, embody the pain through the materialization of the puppet.

To narrate and represent through the puppets the feelings and experiences associated with the victims’ statements of their traumatic experiences, was a collective and individual possibility that allowed for the discovery of personal healing channels. The workshop was a space that facilitated the development of comprehensive and reparatory perspectives

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17 The Memory and Human Rights Museum was inaugurated in 2010. It is a space dedicated to giving visibility to the human rights violations committed by the Chilean State during the dictatorship from 1973 and 1990. See [www.museodelamemoria.cl](http://www.museodelamemoria.cl)

with respect to the damaged trust and bonds which are a result of the psychological and physical impact of political violence. The workshop experience contributed to individual and relational redress, and to social integration, giving participants a way out from the self-absorption and solitude that signify an extreme experience of torture and political repression. Furthermore, group listening, as a principle of reparatory work,<sup>18</sup> and the trust and empathy of the facilitators towards the stories and testimonies, have been of vital importance in ensuring that the participants build trust within the reparation process.

When we observed the enormous therapeutic potential that the puppets had in this context, we were able to review conceptualisations that position this work within the so-called complementary or creative therapies, which have begun to open up an infinity of high impact possibilities for psychosocial reparation. The Puppet Therapy methodology developed by the *Puppets in Transit* team sits within Art Therapy; within the visual arts universe through its use of materials as non-verbal mobilisers, and within Drama Therapy through its use of dramatic expression. The puppet is therefore transformed into a visual as well as a theatrical metaphor. It is important to note that, if the workshop process only consisted of puppet construction, then our Puppet Therapy would be positioned within the material therapeutic dimension, but the puppets are then activated and, in so doing, enter into puppet theatre, to express and mobilise emotions. Citing Moreno (1993), in this case the participants embody in the puppet their “psyche in movement” by passing through a process of memory activation, processing, distancing, understanding, construction and finally, puppet performance.

The puppets are directly responsible for the activation and liberation of participants’ memory and imagination or, as Augusto Boal states: “The aesthetic space liberates memory and imagination” (Boal, 2002, 37). Through this liberation, the puppet allows the trauma and absence to become visible, revealing that the pain exists, can be worked on and made conscious. When the objects or puppets are activated, contact is made

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18 In 1932, Moreno (Argentinian psychiatrist and creator of Psychodrama) began to define the idea of the group as a powerful therapeutic agent.

with this dimension of their life, reconceptualizing it consciously in the present, in order to be able to deal with its memory.

**The puppet helped participants to speak again,  
to form connections, to express wounded biographies**

The visual arts (puppet construction) and expressive work (the theatre dimension) that was proposed in the workshops, capturing the person's subjectivity, and showing aspects of their biography, fosters transformation in which the creator or artist ends up being a personal agent of change. In this sense, silence<sup>19</sup> fractures discourse and allows participants to find a way to objectify, in a material form, their stories (non-verbal but universal) about absence, solitude and disappearance. The material transformed into a puppet by the participants themselves can be converted into a symbol, an embracing support, a visual-dramatic homage that becomes alive, moves, and processes experiences that because of their violent nature have remained suspended in the person who is directly affected, in their family and their close relationships, as well as in society as a whole.

It is possible to analyse the same material integrated into one unique dramatic image: the puppet.

The state of being and not being in the puppet, recognizing this duality and, at the same time, distancing, allowed workshop participants to elaborate on their memories; experiences that are unnarratable through words, or pain that is unreachable from words. Through the language of the puppet they were able to organize and re-elaborate the trauma<sup>20</sup> of losing the image of their disappeared loved ones, into objects loaded with absence and presence at the same time. From that silence, faithfully connected to the idea of dead grammar, narrating the unnarratable, they were able to achieve what psychotherapy could not re-process, and could place

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19 Silence is an aesthetic language installed on bodies in movement, it is conceived as a way of narrating the un-narratable. The workshop participants are invited to relate their absences in silence.

20 Trauma, according to the Chilean psychiatrist Pedro Torres-Godoy (2007), refers to a violent wound on the human psyche, or to terrifying or catastrophic experiences that a person lives through when confronted by life-threatening situations. In 1980, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder was incorporated into the 3rd edition of the mental health classification of the American Psychiatry Association (DSM-III).



their pain in a material that allowed them to take power/control of how they wished to understand themselves from now on, *with* that pain.

### **Memory transmission, post-memory and performance.**

In the workshops where group listening happened, the participants felt they were understood and comprehended. They felt that their stories could be believed by the others in the group. This point was of vital importance, since survivors want their stories to be heard and believed, as Primo Levi (2006) states.<sup>21</sup> In some cases, participants worked in cross-generational couples, for example, father and son or daughter, mother and daughter, and this allowed them to break the silence inside the home.

Working cross-generationally was an important aspect of the workshops. The effects of “post-memory” in subsequent generations is clearly defined by Marianne Hirsch<sup>22</sup>:

The term “post-memory” describes the relationship between the “after generation” and the personal, collective and cultural trauma of the previous generation, that is, their relationship to the experiences that they “remember” through the stories, images and behaviours they grew up surrounded by. The experiences were transmitted to them so profoundly and effectively that they *seem* to be their own memories. The connection of post-memory with the past is, therefore, mediated not only by the memories, but also by imaginative, creative and projective investment (Hirsch, 2012, 19).

Memory transmission occurs through fragments and, in many instances, people do not have the capacity to interpret these fragments. It is important to note that when this dialogue, the physical and emotional space with the puppets, is facilitated, these problematic knots can begin to be processed. In all the victims’ cases, impunity has produced re-traumatization. Silence is an option that many people choose in order to face life

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21 Primo Levi, Jewish writer and Auschwitz survivor, wrote that one of his, and many survivor’s, fears was that no-one would believe their testimonies after returning from the concentration camps.

22 Post-memory is a relatively new concept, developed and coined by Chilean academic Marianne Hirsch.

after a traumatic situation with the objective of protecting their families, nevertheless this does not necessarily stop transmission or avert situations of incomprehension and family breakdown.

The silence inside families affected by political violence becomes an essential factor to be aware of in the puppet therapy workshops. According to Yael Danieli<sup>23</sup>:

It is recognised that the conspiracy of silence is one of the most effective mechanisms for the transmission of psychosocial damage. The dynamics and practices associated with this phenomenon are: social silencing, impunity, justice “to the extent that is possible”, and the absence of truth, amongst others (Danieli in Sandoval et al., 2012, 65).

These are some of the elements that workshop participants mentioned when referring to their family memory story, where the absence of truth as well as extreme impunity had generated a double wound; on the one hand, profound absence, and on the other, absence of justice for their disappeared family members.



Puppet construction. Photo: Puppets in Transit.

The workshop participants went through a period of personal reflection and searched in their memories for something they needed to represent.

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23 Dr. Yael Danieli, director and therapist of the Group Project for Holocaust Survivors and their Children.

They searched for a standpoint from which to recover the experiences they had lived through and their memories, and from there they graduated to the level of sharing their experiences with others. They designed and created a puppet guided by Polo Fernández, member of the *Puppets in Transit* team, in order to process and work around that memory embodied in the puppet (sometimes representing themselves, a disappeared family member, or another family member, or a person who was significant for them during this process).



Finished puppet. "Puppets and Memory" workshop, Santiago, Chile. 2015.  
Photo: Víctor Robles.

The puppet's aesthetic and visual character allowed them to work on content symbolically. They developed an interactive piece of work in which their memories were integrated into an open group-devised showing for their closest community group. In many cases, the process of integrating several stories helped them to present their own stories, without

having to say what their relationship was to them; by speaking, in a way, through a mask.

### Testimonies

Javiera Barrientos was a participant in the “Puppets and Memory” workshop, 2015. Her father was detained in the National Stadium<sup>24</sup> after the coup. She comments: “When I was fifteen, I found out accidentally and thanks to an aunty, that my father had been detained in the National Stadium.



Photo inspiration for the puppet. “Puppets and Memory” workshop, Santiago, Chile. 2015. Photo: Puppets in Transit.

That was the answer I was looking for... I had built my father’s story on his silences, which I assumed were his way to protect us and allow us to live without the fear that he and my mother had felt. When I turned 27, the same age that my father was when he was kidnapped, I made a parallel between my life and his, and I found the courage to open up a conversation with him about this part of his life. The motivation that led me to participate in the ‘Puppets and Memory’ workshop came from the fact that the detention and torture my father went through has had no

<sup>24</sup> The National Stadium is a sporting precinct in Santiago. It was the largest torture and detention centre during the Chilean military dictatorship, used during the first few months after the coup.

reparation... therefore the wounds have remained silenced and hidden. So, I turned all that into the materialization of my puppet, which relays in written form some of the moments of his story, and my story in its costume.”



Finished puppet. “Puppets and Memory” workshop, Santiago, Chile. 2015.  
Photo: Víctor Robles.

Carolina González Toro was a participant in the “Puppets and Memory” workshop, 2015. She is the daughter of Ramón González Ortega, victim of political execution, 1973. When we spoke to Carolina about the possibility of sharing her testimony as a workshop participant, she proposed that this experience could be depicted in three stages: “Firstly, uncertainty: I began my participation in the workshop aware of my need for healing in relation to what I had lived through during the dictatorship and its implications. Experiencing the workshop process helped me to get to know myself, to search for my father... and through this (personal)

growth, it gave me the ability to dig even deeper inside myself, until I arrived at my childhood with my father, through the puppet.”

“I would define the second stage as beginning with the construction (of the puppet). The wonderful illusion of bringing what was behind me, that I wanted to rescue from my life, into the present... I wanted to recover everything that could help me to go forward, and get rid of everything that had kept me in pain.”



Final performance, “Puppets and Memory” workshop, Santiago, Chile. 2015. Photo: Víctor Robles.

“The third stage is the ‘me stage’. I began the workshop for my father, he was the motive, the centre... I wanted to look for him, to find him, to call him, to see him, to reach him, to imagine him... I think that’s how it was, but it didn’t turn out that way. During the process of construction I felt focused on myself (the little girl), I felt how she has helped me to

destroy the images of a painful past... now I wanted to embrace her, protect her and that's what I did, and I enjoyed it immensely.”



Eliana Zamorano, mother of Luis Guajardo Zamorano (detained and disappeared). Fondart project, “Puppets and Memory”, Villa Grimaldi, Santiago, Chile. 2015. The photo shows the memory activation process; presenting meaningful objects: her son’s clothes. Photo: Puppets in Transit.



Creation and construction of the puppet inspired by her son. Photo: Víctor Robles.



Eliana's finished puppet of Guajardo, next to the bicycle chosen by her as a homage to her son who was a cyclist. Photo: Víctor Robles.



Fondart project 2015: "Puppets and memory" workshop launch. Memory and Human Rights Museum, Santiago, Chile. Photo: Víctor Robles.





Verónica Heredia, daughter of Juan Heredia, teacher detained and disappeared in 1973. Fondart project 2017: “Aesthetics of Memory and Transgenerational Damage”, Concepción, Chile. Photo: Puppets in Transit.



Final performance, “Aesthetics of Memory and Transgenerational Damage” project workshops in Lota and Concepción, Chile. 2017. Photo: Puppets in Transit.



Mother and daughter working on the construction of their puppets. Valentina Muñoz created her mother as a child, and Verónica Heredia (Valentina's mother) made a puppet of her detained disappeared father. Fondart project 2017: "Aesthetics of Memory and Transgenerational Damage", Concepción, Chile. Photo: Puppets in Transit.



Ester Hernández in the PRAIS Centre workshop. "Aesthetics of Memory and Transgenerational Damage", Concepción, Chile. 2017. Photo: Puppets in Transit.

### Final reflections

Although these interventions are based in puppet theatre, it is important to clarify that the impact generated by the use of puppets comes from two sources: on the one hand, the puppet is a visual and expressive object that works with non-verbal resources drawn from Art Therapy and, on the other hand, the different materials that are assembled and animate an expressive object in movement draw on elements of Drama Therapy. The visual and expressive, as well as the expressive in movement, are harnessed for reparation.

Therefore, we could conceive of the puppet as one of the most powerful artistic tools for supporting the processing of complex trauma. The high level of sensitivity, fragility and humanity evoked by the puppet is an invitation that mobilizes the deepest silence and pain. The projects in 2015 and 2017 would not have had the same impact if the visual arts and theatre formats had been worked on separately. The question remains: would an arts and crafts workshop on its own have got through to the participants in the same way? Would a theatre workshop have mobilized the participants' memories in the same way? Is there something unique about the puppet that profoundly touches sensitive areas (of the psyche)?

In the 2015 and 2017 workshops run by *Puppets in Transit*, as well as developing space for reflection and analysis in the symbolic reparation of transgenerational damage, based on the exchange of testimonies between survivors and their families, participants were also provided with tools from the poetic, visual and expressive universe of puppet theatre. They learnt construction and manipulation techniques so that the group could make the process of their testimonies visible, and thereby helped to foster Memory Culture in Chile.

Via the training that the *Puppets in Transit* team imparts in their Puppet Therapy Diploma Course, we hope that the experiences described in this article can be replicated by future memory-mobilizing agents. This independently-run training scheme (which is pioneering work in Chile), involves a teaching staff of psychiatrists, psychologists, therapists, actors and puppeteers. They have developed an annual program that trains professionals from diverse areas (such as: health, education, theatre, social work and therapy) in therapeutic puppet intervention, focused on the areas of memory, human rights, disability and vulnerable children.

Finally, it is important to state that puppet work as a therapeutic device is still at a developmental stage, constantly integrating new elements into a continual process of research and exploration. Our objective is to make the puppet's therapeutic function an object of study, independent of other complementary therapies.

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Andrea Markovits  
 Director Puppet Therapy Diploma  
 (Muñecoterapia)  
 Santiago  
 Chile  
[www.munecoterapia.cl](http://www.munecoterapia.cl)  
[andrea.markovits@gmail.com](mailto:andrea.markovits@gmail.com)

Andrea Markovits, Director of the Puppets in Transit company, and has been Director and teacher on the Puppet Therapy (Muñecoterapia) Diploma Course in Santiago, Chile since 2017. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the programme has been developed to run fully on-line. Fondart Chile Scholar Creates, Ministry of Cultures, Arts and Heritage (2020-2021) Master of Arts in Health and Art Therapy (Finis Terrae University). Trained as a Special Education teacher (Disability), she also studied Dramatherapy at the University of Chile, and Puppetry at the School of Puppetry and Drama in Tel Aviv, Israel. She was a therapist at the Feuerstein Institute in Jerusalem, The International Centre for the Enhancement of Learning Potential (ICELP). She worked as a volunteer puppeteer with child victims of the Syrian war at Israel's Sief Hospital (2013). On tour as a puppeteer at AKIM ISRAEL (The National Association for the Integration of Children and Adults with Intellectual Disabilities). Creator and facilitator of the first Virtual Integrated Laboratory of Puppets and Objects for Diversity, sponsored by the Cultural Centre of Spain (2020). She has been invited to present her work at the Puppet Power Conference Online 2020 (Calgary), at the I Puppets, Health and Education Conference organized by the National Dramatic Center of Madrid and Topic Tolosa (Madrid, 2019), and at the First Symposium "Broken Puppets: Symposium on Puppetry, Disability, & Health" (Cork, 2017). Teaches Puppet Therapy on the Master of Art Therapy course at Finis Terrae University. Her teaching and puppetry praxis in Chile is directed towards: memory and trauma, with survivors and families of political violence and people with intellectual disabilities, women deprived of liberty, women and children living with HIV / AIDS, and shelter for children and teenagers.

Tatiana Pushkareva  
Darya Agaltsova  
**A Socio-Cultural Project “My Doll and Me”:  
Combined Educational, Psychological and Art  
Technology**

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*Review paper*

**Abstract:** The article describes the authors’ experience during a socio-cultural project “My doll and me”, in terms of organization and participation. This project was carried out during social and cultural studies training at the Russian State Social University and the Russian Pedagogical State University. A Gestalt approach and analytical psychology became the theoretical and methodological bases of the project, realized in practice in folk-doll creation, interpretation and play.

**Keywords:** social-cultural project, folk-doll, Gestalt approach, psychoanalytic psychology, art-therapy, doll-therapy, performance

## Project methodology

The combined (psychological, educational and art) workshop “My doll and me” is a socio-cultural project based at Library No. 221 North-Western administrative district of Moscow, which has been carried out with the scientific-methodological support of the Department of sociology and cultural philosophy of the Russian State Social University.

The methodology of the psychological workshop, which is the basis of the project, was developed by Gestalt psychologist E. Pushkareva and analytical psychologist N. Bogdanova. (Pushkareva, T., Pushkareva, E., 2015). Over the course of the project, the content and objectives of the workshop have expanded, so that it has acquired pedagogical and artistic features.

For the four years (2014–2018) twenty five combined (educational, psychological and art) workshops were held with different participants (about 250 people of all ages, mostly female), most of whom were from the student “auditorium”. These were students specialising in the following subjects: “Folk Art Culture”, “Cultural Studies”, “Pedagogical Education (Music)”, “Design”, “Social and Cultural Activities”.

The combined workshop “My doll and me”, is based on the principles and methods of Gestalt approach and partly on analytical psychology. It combines elements of art therapy (doll-therapy), group therapy (training), and women’s traditional practices. During the workshop, participants made popular dolls, creatively reinterpreting tradition. While maintaining the basic parameters, the “motanka” – folk doll (a rag doll, made without stitching) is open to all possible options for the creative interpretation of the image (size, color and length of hair, dress, jewelry, style). An important result of the workshop is the creation of a personal, hand-made art object. The created image becomes a kind of metaphor for the art of its maker, the analysis of which (in fact self-analysis) is carried out by the master. The seminar also involves the spontaneous creation of the doll’s history, meetings with the other participants’ dolls, and improvising short scenes.

The method of the “My doll and me” workshop has been developed by us mainly in line with Gestalt therapy – psychotherapeutic guidelines that emerged in the 1950s through the work of the German-American psychologist Frederick Perls Solomon (1893–1970). Unlike other areas

of psychotherapy (psychoanalysis, Jungian analysis, transactional analysis, psychology and Rogerian empathic listening etc.), Gestalt implies the equal artistic participation and mutual responsibility of the client and the therapist in the process, which leads to widespread use of creative methods in Gestalt therapy. The fluid, changeable nature of traumatic and healthy life situations serves as an important foundation of Gestalt theory and practice (Mann, 2013, 7). With categories such as “figure”, “background”, “box”, “contact”, “contact cycle”, Gestalt therapists contribute to an understanding and a kind of “settling in” client-changing situation, not attempting to generalize about the whole of the client’s life (which is characteristic of the classical schools of psychotherapy).

The doll has had universal importance throughout the history of human culture. Beginning with primitive inverse images, it is a kind of “cultural manifestation of the lines of power” (Morozov, 2011, 23). In its cultural history as a three-dimensional image of a human or animal designed for creative manipulation (in play or religio-mystical rituals), the doll had, and still has, a different function (Pushkareva, 2015). In contrast to sculpture (which requires contemplation, comprehension of the author’s intention, as well as the distance between the perceiver and the maker), the doll involves manipulation – a “meaning-game” (Lotman 1992, 378). It is this feature that turns the doll into a powerful therapeutic tool, for which the opportunities are truly endless.

It is known that doll therapy involves the following transformative mechanisms of psychic energy: projection, substitution, sublimation, identification (Grebenshchikova, 2007, 14). According to our observations, the doll created always appears as a version of the person’s identity, as an unconscious way a person visualizes a version of the subpersonalities that are relevant at that moment. In the process of doll-making a person inevitably gets into a situation of positive acceptance. In our case, it is common in doll-therapy for attributes to be revealed very clearly, because in the process of a psychological workshop, a rag doll-“motanka” is made – an authentic folk doll, simple and elegant, made by an age-old traditional technique, and essentially free of the risk of the possible failure to represent an image. We can say that the participant is literally “doomed” to create an aesthetically beautiful doll – its metaphorical image. The democratic nature of popular culture allows each participant to overcome



possible uncertainty, to create their art object in the allotted period of time (3-4 hours).

Like all art therapy practice, doll-therapy involves dissociating from the problem (i.e. the opportunity and ability to look in from the outside at the created object itself, and even to correct it, which means – you (Grebenshchikova, 2007; Timoshenko, 2001). The doll (due to its anthropomorphic nature), in comparison with other products of creativity, has properties peculiar to, and very precise metaphors for, the person who made it. By changing the doll's image, the person is able to change him/herself, and to do so in a safe, relatively playful form (Timoshenko, 2001).

According to our observations, the work with the doll returns a person to his/her bodily feelings, finding a sense of touch with their body which they have lost, and makes it possible when working on identity to rely on their physical senses, not just the image itself. The doll, like all practices which distance people from everyday life, energizes them. In addition, the doll in our workshop becomes a special means of communication in the group: to make contact on behalf of the doll is not only interesting, but useful.

In our workshop, the doll is an impression of the person, their metaphorical image, that can capture both the external and internal features of the author. In any creative process there is a mysterious process of unconscious objectification. In our case, with a doll – an anthropomorphic image – we are talking about the materialization of the Jungian archetype, manifested in the individual unconscious. Archetype, one of Jung's definitions, is a dynamic image of the collective unconscious, a fragment of the objective psyche, which is experienced as a living, really existing, human being (Jung, 2010, 129). The matrix of Jungian archetypes (person, shadow, child, anima, animus, mother, child, wise old man, animal), of course, does not exhaust all their diversity. According to Jung, archetypal images are present from birth in the human psyche and can be activated by any situation corresponding to this archetype. Our workshop situation in the classroom (group work in an unfamiliar team), contributes to the fact that the "persona" is often activated in the members of the workshop. According to Jung's definition, the "persona" is an ideal image in which a person "is looking for himself", "an arbitrary segment of something of the psyche" (Jung, 2010, 182), or the way a person wants to appear in the eyes

of others. The “persona” forms the psychosocial identity of the person and is the same as their social role. The “persona” is inherently plural (is a set of sub-personalities), and in the workshop materializes as a “personality”, current at the moment, or a certain subpersonality, which is determined by the situation.

According to Jungian teachings, archetypes are located at different levels of cultural and historical communities and have their own hierarchy: the archetypes of humanity, culture, gender, family. In some of our psychological workshops, not only Jungian archetypes were used for modelling and making “motanka” folk dolls, but also those of folk culture, as embodied in the tradition of doll-amulets and ritual rag dolls.

Folk doll – a syncretic phenomenon, connecting in its traditional version different features, is one of the most convenient ways in to the personal and collective unconscious and of integrating it into consciousness. The experience of the workshop was successful in such types of ritual folk dolls (acting simultaneously as archetypes) as “Desyatiruchnitsa”, “Nerazluchniki”, “Kubyshka-travnitsa”, and “Spiridon-Solntsevorot”. Popular culture in essence, is esoteric, the personality is not integral, but is hidden in the form of social roles (Chesnov, 2014, 40), the accommodation of which is in the process of doll making, Subsequent interactions in the workshop process are also productive. With the image of the Other, embodied in the doll, identification becomes a version of yourself that allows you to explore, accept and then to integrate what is newly discovered thus, the sub-personality in the current personality structure of an individual. At the same time the materialization of the archetype encountered in the process of our psychological workshop, contributes to the translation of the unconscious into consciousness, and the ultimate aim to gain integrity and harmony with oneself and the world.

### **Workshop methodology**

The workshop can be a part of various educational programmes, programmes of personal growth, and training in organizations. In the process of a workshop (which takes 3-4 hours, with 3 to 15 participants), conducting communication between a host and a participant is foremost. Initially, the facilitator asks participants to talk about their expectations,

to think about what is current, pointing out problems, as well as sharing their emotional states, and physical sensations. The host may comment on what participants say, to clarify and focus on actual problems, and also to encourage the participants to talk about their experiences. At the beginning of the workshop the host emphasizes that he hears each participant, and that each participant is important for the group to work. At the beginning of the workshop there is an intervention that will evolve throughout the event: setting up paying attention to physical sensations, feelings, reactions, changing states. All this, as a rule, is not typical for the everyday life of people living in the mad rhythm of a modern city. Modern culture is not conducive to forming the habit of “spotting yourself”, respecting your feelings and noticing signals from your body. Thus, at the beginning of the workshop a participant has the opportunity not only to “spot with the help of the moderator, but also to develop the ability to notice themselves” in the intense rhythm of their life.

When the host gives instructions for making the dolls, he asks the participants to pay attention to their feelings during the making process, to try to highlight what was difficult for them and what was particularly interesting. While the dolls are being made, the host can comment on what is happening, answer questions, prompt the participants to consider the process of making the doll, itself an art object, as a kind of metaphor for participant activities, and a metaphor for his/her personality, whilst refraining from expressing their own concerns about anyone’s work. Even if encountering a direct question (for example: “What long arms my doll has got! What does it mean?”) it is important to stimulate a creative interpretation of what is happening with each participant. Once the dolls are completed, the host asks the makers to talk about their dolls, perhaps give them names, and come up with a story. There are also games and exercises on the interaction of the dolls for the participants to play (“catwalk”, “acquaintance”, “documentary theatre”, “tell me about me” and others).

As noted above, often in the process of the workshop the participants create a person. In Jungian doctrine, it is the image of their own “I” that occurs as a response to the request of society.

In the development of the “person” there can be two extremes. First, over-identification with the person (identification with the social role, exaggerating the importance of social recognition). Second, ignoring the

needs of society, which can act as a “negative identification” (demonstration of negative traits without regard to the requirements of society) or a withdrawal into the inner world – a kind of rejection of “person” (about such people we often say that they have no skin) (Stain, 2010). These extremes are often seen in the doll.

In practice, in our workshop excessive identification with the “person” can be expected to be found in special attention to the doll’s clothing: participants stated that they would create an “haute couture” dress with different unusual items, spending most of the allotted time on its production. One participant fixed adhesive paper with the price tag on the back of a pretty frilly dress. When the host drew attention to the strange nature of such a decision, the maker did not hesitate: “I just wanted to fix the dress... but really, each of us has a price!” Another participant made the dress transparent, which presumably can be interpreted as the undeveloped “personality” (a person “without skin”) and perhaps the lack of social adaptation. The above conclusions were confirmed when communicating with participants outside the workshop. But the final conclusion about what every detail means in the image of the doll remains always beyond the maker. The host’s role is to show the range and logic of possible metaphorical interpretations.

The practice of the workshop showed that embodied in the doll, the shadow emerges from the unconscious – the archetype – revealing the instinctive forces of vitality that are in conflict with the rules and morals of society. Their detection and interpretation is unexpected, and often contributes to the discussion of the general problem of mental development, postulated by most areas of psychology: integrity and attainment. In addition, a safe affirmation like this of “inconvenient” parts of the personality leads to the release of vital energy. Thus, in one of the workshops there was a doll with unusually long arms. To the question of the host, the doll’s author replied: “Yes! My doll has grasping hands, and she is not afraid of dirty work.” When members talk about their doll, a clue comes from the fact that the doll is a kind of projection of the subject, and reveals that the story of the participant and their doll has some characteristic qualities and traits that may be in the participant. For a host it is very important to keep judgments non-judgmental. Also positive suggestions can lead comments. For example: “Your doll is dressed modestly. It seems, she appreciates

simplicity and sincerity.” According to the practice of Gestalt therapy, as a result of detection and attribution of personal qualities to the dolls, additional mental resources, previously spent on ignoring and retracting inconvenient parts of the personality, were released. The inner world of the participants in the workshop being objectified, there appears to be a reification of human sub-personalities that adds clarity and support to the experience. The workshop promotes for the participants a feeling that time is extended, which can also be considered as a therapeutic effect.

At the end of the workshop the host asks what was new for members, what impressed them, as well as talking about their physical condition. After the workshop sleep is recommended to give the unconscious time to carry out its important work on the restructuring of consciousness (the unconscious part during the workshop becomes the property of consciousness). Normally, for comprehension and integration of a new experience, a week or two is required.

### **Discussion of the project methodology and project design**

Group methods of psychological work, which include the psychological workshop format, started to develop after the Second World War. But using the format of a psychological workshop in institutionalized teaching practice in higher schools is difficult for several reasons: the need for mandatory compliance with the condition that participation must be voluntary; the need for the personal motives of each participant to be explored for group psychological work; the safeguards applied to psychological work; the need for an interdisciplinary team to include a psychologist. In the resolution of all these psychological conditions, the workshop will be appropriate and effective in teaching practice that demonstrates small but powerful examples (Baktygulova, 2013; Voppel, 2004).

As for the problem that the workshop methodology is based on the manufacturer and interpretation of the image of a doll, it's necessary to elaborate on alternative methods of doll-therapy outlined in the book T. Y. Koloshina and G. V. Tymoshenko *Puppets in psychotherapy* (2001). The book presents and analyzes the experience of working with psychiatric clients through the creation of puppets. The authors follow the approach of transpersonal psychology. Puppets (marionettes), unlike the

Doll – “motanka” (which, according to popular tradition, are made without a sewing needle), require quite tough practices: e.g. if you included a Kinder Surprise plastic egg, you (might) need to pierce it to attach the strings. The authors recognized that many clients are simply unable to do this themselves, as the doll at this stage is already perceived as “alive”, and they have to resort to the help of the therapist. Such “brain surgery” (an expression of the makers) can hardly be recognized as therapy.

Hosts in puppet-therapy prefer to collect puppets made after a session, noting that the willingness of the client to give the puppet can be considered a good criterion of therapy. In our workshop dolls remain the property of the participants, and they often work on them. Analysis, improvement, discussion with loved ones, showing them off, continues outside the studio, which is quite natural and fully consistent with the well-known thesis that true therapeutic work has a prolonged character. It would be difficult to continue without the dolls. Our experience shows that individual work with the doll (self-awareness) can last in some cases up to two weeks.

The proponents of puppet-therapy suggested formal criteria for the analysis of puppets by size, colour, and other features. Our experience shows that any formal criteria here are conditional, and all the details should be interpreted by the member who holds the role of an expert. The host performs the role of consultant-moderator. All the above differences between our psychological workshop “My doll and me” and the methods of “Puppets in psychiatry”, in our opinion, are explained by the specifics of the Gestalt method, which we adhere to: avoiding suggestive methods of influence and the emphasized nature of relations between the client and the therapist (Hlomov, 1992).

It should be noted that the authors of the book *Puppets in Psychiatry* summed up the results of their techniques, and they prove worthwhile for us as well. They notice that a person in dealing with a work of art, with a puppet in particular, “trains its plurality” (Koloshina, Timoshenko, 2001, 42); that is, the ability to be different in different situations, the ability to have multiple identities, which, as we mentioned above, is a challenge to modern society. The authors distinguish between concepts of “multiple personality” (psychiatric disorder) and “multiplicity of identity” (psychological value).

The authors show the importance not only of the mechanism of identification and identity, but also of disidentification with the puppet (which is especially important when the “shadows” are materialized). An amazing experience of compensation in quite severe disorders can be seen, but at the same time there are restrictions on puppet-therapy use: in the case of the metaphysical intoxication of a client, in severe disorders at the acute stage, or if any drug therapy is being used.

We cannot not agree with the authors when they talk about the “frightening efficiency” of psychotherapeutic work in making the puppets, while understanding that there are still a lot of mysterious puzzles that require not only careful consideration but also professional diligence.

### **Project results**

In General we can say that the workshop is aimed at solving one of the major social problems of higher education – the fact that the theoretical component of the curriculum greatly exceeds the practical component (Yarskaya, 2008). In integrated practice, workshop students are introduced to the most important areas of modern science: art therapy, Gestalt psychology, Jungian (analytical) psychology; and getting acquainted with the methodology of group work.

In the case of this workshop we can talk about drawing on a socio-cultural resource, in the broadest sense: about the use of historical-cultural practices in the creation of authentic folk dolls, the immersion in and study of popular culture. The development of a free creative activity undertaken in the workshop, therefore, is closely associated with the practice, not a part of traditional social education in higher school – of needlework. The idea of unconscious realization, laid down in the workshop, returns education to a significant level of reality that, in our opinion, is necessary in a situation where education, and the environment we live in, are becoming increasingly virtual.

The technology of a workshop focused on identity, on developing the ability to self-introspect and self-knowledge, promotes the development and accumulation of personal resources. It should be noted that not all students are capable of immediately and fully involving themselves in the workshop at the level of its main tasks – experience, understanding how to

create a doll, and the result obtained as a metaphor for their personality. But due to group work all the participants share this special experience, in varying degrees, primarily by observing others and acting by analogy.

According to workshop participants, the workshop opens the possibility for relaxation and encourages them to improve themselves. The majority of participants noted positive changes in themselves after the workshop: mood improvement, the stabilizing of emotional states, awareness of their personal psychological reactions, self-acceptance, increasing self-esteem. Approximately half of the participants continued to work with the folk doll at home, using the leading idea of the metaphor and making necessary, from the point of view of self-improvement, adjustments to the doll image. The effect certainly opens opportunities for the development of resource-reducing and resource-developing technologies.

### **Conclusion**

The workshop “My doll and me” is a combined innovative technique to be used as a universal pedagogical module in the program of social higher education and pedagogical higher education. The workshop is based on the principles and techniques of the Gestalt approach and Jungian psychology. It combines elements of art therapy, group therapy, and traditional women’s practices. During the workshop, participants make a folk doll, creatively reinterpreting tradition. An important result of the workshop is to have made one’s own art object by hand.

The main psychological mechanism underlying the workshop is awareness of the process of doll-making and the result as a metaphor for their own personality. The image of the Other, embodied in the doll, becomes a kind of version of personal identification that allows you to explore, accept and then integrate what has been newly discovered – viz. the actual personality in the personality structure of an individual. All this contributes to the integration of the unconscious into consciousness, and ultimately aims for the attainment of human integrity, and harmony with oneself and the world.

We can distinguish several types of pedagogical result that are important for the training of specialists in the social sphere. Firstly, the development of information and knowledge. In combined practice,



psychology-workshop students get acquainted with major directions of modern science; art therapy, Gestalt psychology, Jungian psychology, and with forms of folk culture. Secondly, we should emphasize the psychological and cognitive outcomes associated with self-awareness, with the development of the practice of self-observation and self-knowledge, so necessary for successful work with people, and especially helpful to them. In the third place, the psychological and humanistic outcomes that open new possibilities of self-improvement. Fourthly, the technological results, consisting of the development of the simple and graceful technology of making “motanka”-dolls, which can also be used in situations not related to a psychology workshop. Fifthly, the results that come from the development of a free creative activity carried out in the specific subject area.



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Tatiana Pushkareva, PhD, Associate  
Professor  
Culture Sociology and Philosophy  
Department  
Russian State Social University  
Moscow  
Russia  
ap-bib@yandex.ru

Born in 1971 in Moscow. In 1994 graduated from the History Faculty of the Moscow State Pedagogical University. In 2001 presented her dissertation on the topic of “History-culture-memory: concerning the problem of historical time”. 1998-2007: Deputy Editor-in-Chief of the journal “Vestnik uchebnoi i detskoj literatury” (the Bulletin of educational and children’s literature). Since 1999 has taught at the Russian State Social University.



Darya Agaltsova, PhD, Associate  
Professor  
Foreign Languages Department  
Financial University under the  
Government of the Russian Federation  
Moscow  
Russia  
darya\_agaltsova@mail.ru

Born in 1981 in Omsk. In 2002 graduated from the Computer Science Faculty of Omsk State Pedagogical University (speciality: Teacher of Computer science and English language). In 2007 presented her dissertation on the topic of “Development and use of the author’s applications discovering the possibilities of information and communication technologies (giving the example of future English teacher training)”. Since 2015 has taught at the Russian State Social University. Since 2019 has been an associate professor of the Foreign Languages Department, Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation.



Roberto Ferreira da Silva  
Aparecida Oliveira da Silva  
Ana Paula da Silva Freitas  
**From Ludic to Therapeutic: The Experience  
of Three Children with Autism Spectrum  
Disorder with the Art of Puppetry**

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*Professional paper*

**Abstract:** This paper aims to present a report based on the experience of the use of puppetry in the therapeutic treatment of three children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), all from the same family. Throughout twelve sessions held at Origens Puppetry Association headquarters located in Belo Horizonte city, Brazil, the children carried out a series of activities to stimulate creativity, focus and self-confidence, impacting on their behaviour, especially in the family environment.

**Key words:** puppets, children, ASD, Brazil, therapy

## Introduction

The developmental potential of children with disabilities, since Vygotsky's studies in the 1920s, started to be considered in the process of understanding the singularity of these individuals beyond their biological limitations (Silva, 2017).

According to Vygotsky's assessment, from a cultural historical perspective, the child with a disability is no more or less developed than a child without a disability, but develops in a different way.

Vygotsky (2012 apud Silva, 2017) emphasizes that the development of every human being, with or without disability, is not linear or harmonious. On the contrary, it is marked by conflicts and ruptures, and follows irregular paths.

As to children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)<sup>25</sup>, some studies point out the importance of ludic and interactive activities in the development of their social relations (Martins, 2009; Bagarollo, 2005). Silva (2017), for example, when investigating six children with autism at a kindergarten in Brasília city, Brazil, found that they are capable of playing, creating, imagining and assuming roles.

What should be highlighted is that the ludic experiences investigated in most of the works involving children with ASD mainly include games with peers and/or the use of toys. Ludic experiences related to puppetry are still little explored in studies with autistic children. Hence, the question that motivated the present work was: How can art therapy with puppets help in the cognitive development and social interaction of children with autism?

This work was developed in the scope of art therapy, a technique that uses art as the main mode of expression and communication (Santamarta, 2016). It is a "predominantly non-verbal process, through plastic arts and

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25 The concept of autistic spectrum disorder most commonly accepted today refers to a field of clinical images that differ from one another, but has a fundamental unity concerning the impairment of social interaction. Such interaction may occur as apathy or indifference to others; a passive acceptance of being approached; an active, but unusual approach to others. This triad began to be used in Brazil and in the world as a reference for the classification of autism. Conceptualizing autism, however, is not and has never been an easy task as the diagnosis is very open to controversy (Cavalcanti and Rocha, 2007 apud Silva, 2017).

dramatization, which welcomes the human being in all his complexity” (Coqueiro et al., 2010, 860).

## Methodology

In February 2018, three siblings diagnosed with ASD arrived at Origens Puppetry Association headquarters (hereafter Origens)<sup>26</sup>, due to the family’s need<sup>27</sup> for activities that could help the children in some way, mainly emotionally. The children were two girls aged 7 and 8 and a 9 year-old boy.

They live with their parents in Belo Horizonte city (Brazil) and are enrolled in a municipal school, located in their neighbourhood.

This report based on working experience will portray activities carried out during 12 sessions, from March to September 2018, held bi-weekly in the company of two teachers, one of them being a graduate student in Art Therapy.

At the first stage, the children’s initial activity was playing running games with the intention of promoting physical exercises, looking at how it affected them, rather than referring to the condition presented by the mother, who described the three siblings as having Autism Spectrum Disorder. The children were able to navigate the spaces as freely as they liked (the yard and the auditorium). At this stage, the goal was to develop a behavioral reading of the siblings in order to establish a relationship of trust between them and the researchers and, at the same time, to measure their ability to create games between themselves.

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26 Origens Puppetry Association was founded in 2011 in Belo Horizonte and its mission is to promote puppetry. The institution has a history of working with people with disabilities both in training them to act as puppeteers and in the creation of puppets to stimulate their motor and cognitive abilities. The report was published in a book (Silva, 2016) that shows how puppetry can contribute to the socializing process of people with disabilities. Although the Origens managers had already had some experience working with people with disabilities in previous projects, in 2017, it was the first time that people with ASD had been admitted to the institution.

27 In the first semester of 2018, while the children were being supported by teachers, their mother was supported by a volunteer psychologist. These services inaugurated the project “*Cuidando de quem cuida*” (Taking care of the caretaker), which aimed to contribute to the quality of the family group’s life.



Subsequently, over the course of four sessions, preliminary exercises were offered with glove puppets (behind a box) for manipulation, and the stimulation of storytelling created by the children. The two older children were able to get involved and even chose names for their puppets. The youngest, however, did not show interest at any time (but she often walked around the theater while her two siblings did the puppet manipulation exercises).

At the fifth session, a guest puppeteer ran a shadow theater workshop with the children. Using a smartphone flashlight as a light source, she introduced shadow puppets.

Another activity offered to the children during the sessions was drawing. In the process of art therapy with puppets for the siblings, drawings were created in the same way that puppets are created for *Origens*.

From this perspective, the drawings made here are equivalent to the character design stage, which dictates which construction and manipulation techniques will be chosen. After an analysis of the drawings created by the siblings, the project coordinators realized that the best construction technique would be stick puppets. Fernandez (2003) apud Santamarta (2016) points out that, in the case of children with ASD, drawing is a means of training communication skills, memory strategies, understanding emotions and improving empathy.

For ethical reasons, the children were asked to choose a pseudonym. The oldest child chose the pseudonym “Art Grandson” (*Neto da Arte*), the middle one chose “Artista” and their mother chose “Malu” to define the youngest child.

## Results

The first contact of the children with the puppets affected each of them quite differently. When invited to manipulate a glove puppet behind a box, *Artista* revealed a fear of the dark and she made rough movements manipulating the puppet and spoke incomprehensible sentences.

*Art Grandson*, on the other hand, showed an ability to manipulate and narrated a story created by himself, with few pauses. From his body movements during the narration, there was a little anxiety in the performance of this task.

At one point, when they were behind the box together, Artista's puppet began to "bite" Art Grandson's puppet, which ended up interrupting his story. After behaving like this, Artista abandoned the puppet and began to walk around the theater.

The youngest kid (Malu) showed no interest in manipulating puppets and at most of the sessions, spent all the time walking around the stage and the seats, playing on a cellphone and not interacting with her siblings throughout the workshops.

At the fifth session, when they took part in the shadow theater workshop run by the guest puppeteer, Art Grandson manipulated a puppet and worked out that by moving away from the light, or moving closer to it, the puppet's size would change. Artista also manipulated a shadow puppet, but did not remark on this difference in size.

Malu behaved differently this time, that is when she first went behind the box she had the cell phone in her hand, and showed no fear of the dark.

### **The stories**

The choice of storytelling was dictated by whether the stories narrated by the two siblings could be adapted for the specific dramaturgy of puppetry.

The second time the children took part in a storytelling workshop, their creativity was noticeable. Art Grandson told the story "The Lost Treasure", sitting on a chair in the center of the stage.

Before beginning the story, he showed some anxiety, waving his feet and slightly biting his lips. During the narration, his speech was hurried, without pauses and slightly incomprehensible, but with structured and sequential dialogue. After the narration, he was excited to find out if people had understood his story.

Then it was Artista's turn to tell her story. Also seated in a chair in the center of the stage, the child was very agitated before beginning the narration. With a hurried and melancholy voice, she told an "untitled" and incomprehensible story. As soon as she finished speaking, she left the chair and started walking around the theater not wishing to know what her narrative had been like.

The teachers tried to encourage them to repeat their stories a second time. Art Grandson improved on his narrative, but Artista was not interested and continued to move around the area.



Picture 1 – Telling Malu a story with the “Fairy” puppet.

Concerning the involvement of the younger child with the stories, she was amused when she heard a story told by the researcher using a puppet that represented a fairy (Picture 1). At this session, Malu repeated the word “fada” (fairy) several times, but in later encounters she lost interest in interacting with the puppet and opted to run around the space saying some sentences. In Table 1, some sentences spoken by Malu as she roved around are shown. The sentences were spoken intermittently, with several pauses, but one of the researchers wrote them down in a field notebook and put them in the order they were spoken:

Table 1 – Words spoken by Malu on July 14, 2018 (Translated into English)

<p>There is no way ahead...                      Big house, Wall.                      Big, Small.                      Open purse, pick up, help, close.                      Long Track...                      Straight, bent, hot, dry, wet.                      Can I help you?                      There is a way, floating, sinking...                      Light, dark, fast!</p>	<p>Let's go! Silence...                      Heat the water...                      High, deep!                      Some dirt, full, rabbit waits.                      My purse does not close. I will help you!                      Sandwich, hamburger, juice.                      New shoes... Where shoes?                      Three o'clock in the morning...</p>
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### The drawings

Another idea prompted by the sessions was their relationship with the drawings. The first experiment was with the task of coloring a clown that later would be made into a finger puppet. Artista showed determination and skill, coloring within the drawing lines. It took her around 5 minutes to complete the task, but she was not satisfied with the final result. She asked if she would be manipulating the finger puppet.

Art Grandson carried out the activity using denser colors, within the lines, and was satisfied when he had finished coloring and did not show any anxiety. On the other hand, Malu took some pencils and started walking around, with no interest in coloring or making the finger puppets.

The workshop leaders cut out the drawings and turned them into puppets. When Artista's puppet was put on her finger, she did not like the final result, unlike Art Grandson. The two children were invited to go behind the scenes to manipulate the puppets. Art Grandson told a story about two clowns who were friends. Malu was invited to sit and watch her brother's show, which lasted about 3 minutes. (She managed to stay until the end.)

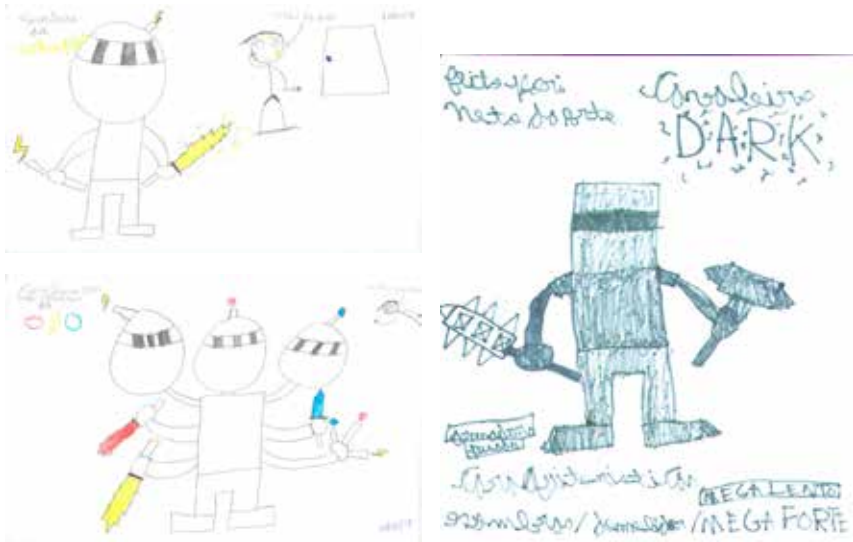


Picture 2 – Stick puppets made from Art Grandson's and Artista's drawings.

Another experience that the children had was the development of drawings that would later be transformed into stick puppets (Picture 2). Art Grandson produced several drawings of knights who, according to him, were part of the story *The lost treasure*, that he created. In the period

between 06/09/17 and 01/09/18, Art Grandson made 12 drawings in total.

Some of Art Grandson's knights were named "Knight of Lightning", "Knight with three heads", "Dark Knight" (Pictures 3A, 3B, 3C), among others. On several drawings, Art Grandson also wrote the characteristics of each knight (super strong, super slow, fast, etc.).



Picture 3 – Art Grandson's drawings A – Knight of Lightning and himself covered in ink; B – Knight with three heads, one is the head of the Knight of Lightning, another of the Knight of Fire and the last one of Knight of Ice. He is represented in the upper right; C – Dark Knight.

Artista, during the same period, made 46 drawings. All of them belong to the manga genre, demonstrating her full knowledge of this genre of comics despite never having attended comics drawing classes. Her characters came in various sizes, usually with facial expressions of anger, doubt, and sadness (Pictures 4A, 4B, 4C). In some sessions, Artista managed to stay focused on drawing for about 50 minutes, and wished to continue after completing the task. At this stage, the difficulty Artista had in accepting routine changes made to the drawings, was noticeable.

It was observed that some of the drawings Artista made portrayed scenes of violence or death. When this happened, Art Grandson said he

would talk to their mother, but Artista asked him not to. At another session, while she was drawing yet another scene of violence, she was very agitated. When asked by the researcher what she would like to do with that drawing, she tore it up. After this, one of the coordinators suggested she made another drawing and she made two. The first pictured two brothers in a room (Picture 4D) and the second two brothers going to school with their parents. After making these drawings, Artista was asked how she felt and she replied “glad”.



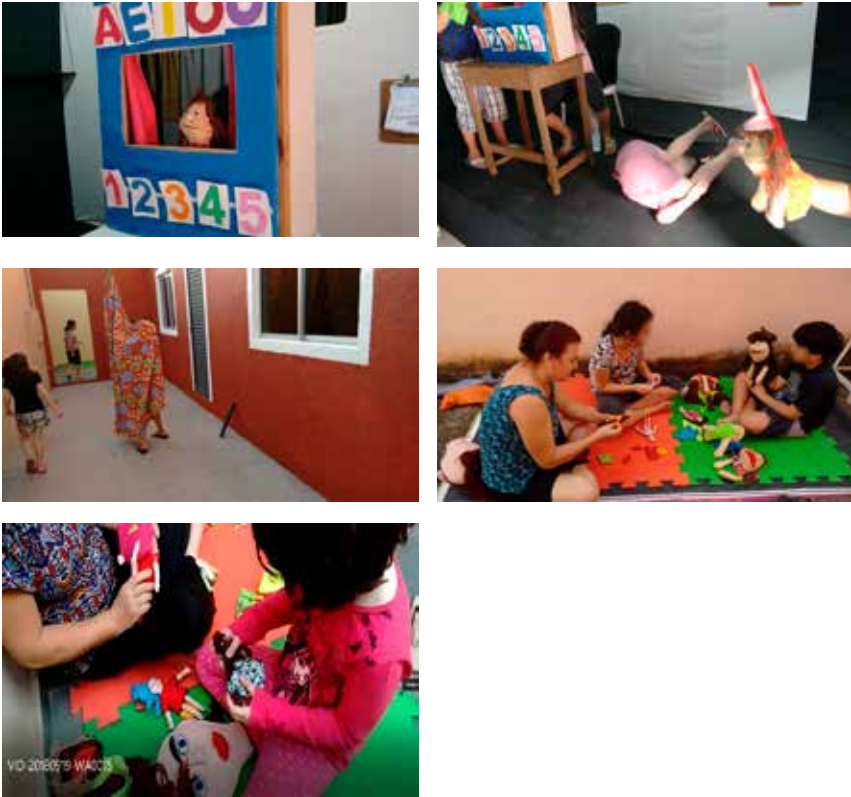
Picture 4 – Artista’s drawings.

The youngest, Malu, did not produce any drawings.

Later, in a meeting with the parents, in order to get a better understanding of what the drawings made by Artista represented, her mother explained that most of the drawings are characters seen on TV cartoons. As to Art Grandson’s drawings, the father described the son’s pleasure in drawing knights.

### The location

The activities offered to the children were carried out both in the internal (Pictures 5A and 5B) and external areas of Origen's headquarters (Pictures 5C, 5D and 5E). The stage was explored both while manipulating puppets, and during storytelling. Besides, the darkness in the auditorium enabled shadow theater activities. On the other hand, the external area was used while playing with wearable puppets (Picture 5C), while warming up and wearing diversity puppets (Pictures 5D and 5E).



Picture 5 – Use of Origen's area by the three children. A – Artista manipulating a glove puppet behind a stage box located on the auditorium stage; B – Researcher trying to interact with Malu using a fairy puppet and Malu is distracted watching her siblings behind the box; C – Art Grandson in a wearable puppet interacting with Malu; D – Researcher, Artista and Art Grandson playing with puppets; E – Malu putting clothes on a diversity puppet.

## Discussion

The arrival of the three children with ASD at Origens was a challenge for the institution and its managers, as they had never worked with this clientele before. On an experimental basis, the children were encouraged to engage in puppetry at first by manipulating glove puppets playfully.

The idea that children with ASD display an innate problem with play is widespread. Silva (2017), however, emphasizes that it is not fully justified and it was corroborated by our work. Art Grandson, for example, performed well using glove puppets behind the box and was able to create stories. Artista managed to play partially, but struggled to focus on the games and on the elaboration of stories. Malu, unlike her siblings, showed apathy towards most activities involving puppet manipulation. In her case, persistence and stimulation with puppets by the researcher was important. After a few meetings, Malu was able to focus on the task of dressing diversity puppets (Picture 5E) and showed focus and attention, which had not been observed before.

Silva (2017) reveals that the “failure to play” shown by the child with autism is related to the lack of experience and access to toys and/or games, and not simply to organic impediments.

Silva (2017), when citing Bagarollo (2005), points out that the child with ASD may have difficulty in establishing interaction with games when the characteristics caused by their organic condition are intertwined with estrangement and paralysis in front of other people. In our work, there was no such strangeness or paralysis relating to the researchers in any of the activities carried out by Malu. On the contrary, the company and encouragement of a researcher was fundamental for Malu to be able to concentrate on some tasks and games proposed.

The drawing activity proved to be important in the development of the children (Art Grandson and Artista)’s attention and focus. It is important to highlight that in the drawings, both children were encouraged to picture themselves. At first, Artista stood only as a spectator of the scenes she drew (as in Pictures 4A and 4B, in which she appears photographing the scene and, in a window, respectively). After several drawings, she began to include herself as part of the scene (as in Picture 4D). Art Grandson, in a relaxed way, had an easy time drawing himself as part of the scene,



even showing that his face was dirty, as he had used ink when coloring his knights.

Artista's drawings demonstrate a very direct relationship with her emotions. When uneasy, she drew evil, sad, clawed characters. When threatened by her brother, she showed fear that her drawings could be shown to their mother. When it was suggested she should make drawings that made her feel happy, she showed more pleasure and joy in accomplishing the task.

Although the drawings were made over several sessions at Origenes, the researchers took into account the risk of an emotional bond by the children with this artistic activity (Fisher, 2001). That is why it is important to stimulate, in the scope of art therapy, different art approaches.

As to how the tasks performed at Origenes influenced the development of social relations, the parents reported that, Malu (the one who had shown most apathy and/or indifference throughout the activities) in particular, became more sociable. The mother reported that the younger kid started hugging people after participating in the project and that the relationships of the children with other people improved both in the family and in school.

It is important to note that, although Malu is the child (of all three siblings) who displays the most difficulty in speech and who showed most indifference to the activities proposed by the researchers, the words mentioned by her while walking through the auditorium (Table 1) may have very deep meanings in the context of her memories and emotions.

The parents also mentioned that Artista lost her fear of the dark at home because of her puppetry experiences, and that Art Grandson's anxiety level decreased and he showed an interest in deepening his knowledge of this artform.

### **Final considerations**

This report sought to present an experience of using puppetry in the therapeutic process of three siblings with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Throughout twelve sessions held at Origenes in Belo Horizonte city, Brazil, the children carried out a series of activities capable of

stimulating creativity, focus, self-confidence, which impacted on their routine behavior, especially in the family environment.

Fernández (2003) apud Santamarta (2016), reiterates the importance of supporting the empowerment of creativity in children with ASD because it is very difficult for them to do it without external help. In this sense, the stimulation by the researchers in the context of storytelling, manipulation of puppets, and in the elaboration of drawings was of fundamental importance for the development of the children's creativity.

As part of this empowerment, the next step will be to create a puppet show from the story *The Lost Treasure* (created by Art Grandson), which will be presented to the children's relatives and will feature Art Grandson and Artista in the cast.

Concerning the future possibility of working with children with ASD, one of the challenges to Origens will be to explore other puppet-manipulation techniques, such as marionettes, direct manipulation, etc. On the few occasions when Art Grandson manipulated puppets, he demonstrated a great ability.

In short, one lesson learned from this experimental work is that a relationship of trust and affection built between children and researchers is essential in the process of raising awareness and understanding of people with ASD; and that puppetry and an adequate theater space are capable of bringing out characters and situations that help people with ASD to express themselves.

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Roberto Ferreira da Silva  
Origens Puppetry Association  
Belo Horizonte  
Brazil  
<http://www.teatrodebonecosorigens.com.br/>  
[robertoatbo@gmail.com](mailto:robertoatbo@gmail.com)

Roberto Ferreira da Silva is a puppeteer, teacher, art therapist, writer of the book *Boneco especial, arte terapia e Inovação social (Special puppets, art therapy and social innovation)*, and corresponding member of UNIMA's Education, Development and Therapy Commission.



Aparecida Oliveira da Silva is a puppeteer, teacher and member of Origens Puppetry research group.



Ana Paula da Silva Freitas is a high school science teacher in Ibirité metropolitan area of Belo Horizonte, has a master's degree in educational sciences from the Federal University of Minas Gerais and is a member of Origens Puppetry research group, her parents' institution.



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The book presents different and new approaches to the use of puppets in up-bringing, education, social work and therapy. It is a significant contribution to the study of applied puppetry, of a research and theoretical nature, with a firm basis in practice. It includes the previously unpublished results of scientific research and case studies. It is aimed at students and teaching staff at humanities and teaching faculties, art academies and medical faculties; scientists and practitioners of applied theatre and puppetry (drama educators, teachers, pre-school teachers, psychologists, social workers and therapists).

Prof. Edvard Majaron,  
Faculty of Education,  
University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

The book gathers together experts in different areas who work in significantly different contexts, and with significantly different fundamental intentions (from raising the quality of life in homes for the aged and infirm, through treatment of collective trauma, to typical therapeutic and structured forms of work). If we also add the different social contexts, the tremendous effort invested in presenting the variety of ways of thinking and practice may be seen. We should also add the fact that all the contributions are written in a serious and professional manner.

Iva Gruić, PhD,  
Faculty of Teacher Education,  
University of Zagreb, Croatia

