

# Elements of Puppet Media

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By Jeffrey L. Peyton

Not unlike the sun, or the air or the energy resources we use to heat our homes, puppets contain certain elements that make them a unique and highly consumable educational resource. Working together - sometimes all at once or sometimes just one at a time—these elements combine to make up a rich and powerful medium. If used correctly, the efficiency of a resource is increased.

People who use puppets are like chemists who uncover a new element, the isolation of which takes us one step further in helping us understand the world. The therapist who suddenly realizes that a child has responded to her because it mattered deeply to the child just to be able to hold the puppet (something three-dimensional) in his hand to help overcome his shyness, and then suddenly asks the same puppet a question to direct the child's attention away from his self-consciousness, is applying a knowledge of puppetry's basic elements.

This puppet power is often glossed over or taken for granted. After all, a puppet can just be a puppet; a no-account castaway plaything. But a puppet makes magic the way a musical instrument makes notes. We can learn how puppets do what they do by examining them—and ourselves—more closely.



## 1. Puppets Are Three-Dimensional

A puppet is a three-dimensional communications tool. But it is different from a book or any other learning prop, mainly because a puppet is connected personally to the user. It is not an abstraction, but a product of the imagination that can immediately command the attention and emotions of those whom the puppet involves. This three-dimensional quality in puppets accounts for their effectiveness as teaching and communications tools.

A puppet can therefore be hand-held, touched, hugged, and stroked. It can be used as a pointer to catch, maintain and direct the attention of those watching. Because puppets are three-dimensional, they can also be grasped and moved. .

Puppets, conducting energy like electrical wire, carry and transmit feelings. They are agents of nature. They are, literally and figuratively, a "size" that children can relate to. They feel good in the hand of a confident user; and appear fun and appealing in the eye of the beholder. While tapes, film, and television can hold the viewing attention of adults or children at varying levels of involvement, the puppet at work can reach within and transform a "viewer" into a participant; can neutralize the casual, passive consumption of the TV-trance into active and aware experience.

It can do such things because the puppet requires the involvement of the user in a variety of ways. Perhaps the most dynamic example of that involvement is illustrated by the simple fact that puppets—as learning tools—must move.

## 2. Movement: Beginnings Of The Element Of Change In Puppetry

Closely aligned to its three-dimensional quality is the element of movement in puppets through which many of its other qualities - including those of the user - emerge. All puppets must move, as must the user when he uses a puppet. MOVEMENT is what separates the stuffed animal from the moving form we call a 'puppet'.

Movement is the first key to a puppet's magical quality. Draw two eyes on a paper leaf-shape and tape the shape to a stick. As you make the leaf say—"Hello, my name is Larry Leaf. Today, I am the color gold"—make the puppet move in time to your words. Make your leaf "dance" in the wind; "float" upon the breeze; "arch and tumble" in the swirling autumn wind. Through movement in puppets, objects of the world, animate as well as inanimate, come to life. In the process, inevitably so must the user. True to form, a "cloud" puppet can appear and disappear, or talk in wispy whispers or thundering claps. The element of movement in a puppet merges naturally with human expressiveness in language and renders all matter potentially lifelike, manipulable, poetic, kinetic and eye-catching.

Because puppets are animated, they can maintain and direct the attention of those who watch them. A teacher using a rabbit face stick puppet like a pointer to guide children's eyes during chalkboard or bulletin board exercises is capitalizing on the quality of movement in puppetry. She tells the children to follow the rabbit's enormous gray ears. Using the puppet in this way also

enhances the teacher's ability to build pace and rhythm into her delivery. Have you exercised to music, and then without it? If so, you know that exercise requires flow and pace to make it satisfying. Throughout academic exercises, a puppet can serve as the vehicle for quick-starts, humorous interludes, spirited movements and memorable endings.

As attention-getters, puppets can be used to introduce lessons, special presentations or regular activities. One nature center program coordinator, for example, used leaf puppets to introduce a Saturday morning session on plant life. Each child in the group chose a tree he liked and then made a paper Leaf Puppet for the tree. The children made the Leaf Puppets talk through simple rhymes about their trees' bark, growth and seasonal cycles. Through puppets, the textbook trees came to life off the page and became an expression of the children's natural love for living things. The teacher's commitment to environmental awareness found its best expression through the puppets, which engaged his students physically (as they held their puppets) and emotionally.

Here are one third-grader's words for a Leaf Puppet, as she made it sing and dance:

I am a leafy leaf. I live on a tree.  
I am very leafy, leafy, leafy.  
Leafy I am. My name is Lucy.  
I like to live in a juicy Apple tree.  
I get full and then I drop and rot.  
My head begins to nod, and I turn brown and yellow.  
I nod my head again and say the end.

### 3. Puppets Are Colorful

As the child's Leaf song suggests, puppetry embodies and highlights color. This quality makes puppetry especially suited to teaching and communications. Consider, for example, the degree to which puppets use and express COLOR, quite literally, in the paper, crayons and other accessories used in their construction and appearance.

Today, color is everywhere in our culture; on the walls of our rooms, on computers, in books and magazines; in movies and television. Given our immersion in color, there is a growing awareness of color and how it affects our habits of consumption and our ability to communicate.

Color takes on added significance as it is used to create life in a puppet. Yellow is the color of the fire-fly puppet's belly; red is the color of the frog puppet's long, floppy tongue. Purple may not be the color of the "Blue Monster," but he may have eaten something that didn't agree with him—a lesson that we're all subject to change of color partly because of our diet.

The act of selecting colors as you make puppets or watch them in action makes color something special, something you've had a hand in shaping as the puppet comes to life. For children, in particular, color has a major emotional and educational influence. Puppets are a tangible means to convey this special influence, which can spark growth and inquiry in related areas.

For example, other facets of color emerge figuratively in language and voice. Through puppets, both student

and teacher can explore words that have color and shadings seen and felt in the way they are expressed: loud, soft, fast, slow. Using puppets, for example, as part of oral expressiveness exercises can help students learn to treat words as the living and colorful miracle they become when they are read with feeling, rather than a drone. In the realm of oral expression, puppets are natural self-explorers. Color blends into every aspect of our lives. The more we learn through color, the greater, more whole our educational taste and vision. The use of color not only heightens the level of involvement in the learning process; it also increases sharpness of vision and perception in the learner.

Whether it is a crayon or a puppet, color-in-the-hand has educational value. If puppets can help to develop a tangible relationship to color, then the TV may at least have a viable competitor in the puppet.

The talented child who sits day after day mesmerized by the color of television with no means to participate personally in the world may forever perceive in black and white. The depth, movement and color contained in the poetry of "Leafy Leaf" may be a glimpse of tomorrow's scientific vision.

### 4. Bases & Shapes: Puppet Building Blocks

Just like color, form contributes to a puppet's appearance. While puppet form can emerge from a vast array of materials such as fabric, wood, paper-mache, etc., Puppetools prefers a simple view of form as "SHAPE." The element of form or "shape," as defined here, is an essential piece in the puzzle of understanding how puppets work.

Seeing puppets literally spring from shapes stimulates the imagination and cultivates creative thinking.

The "Base" is that part of a puppet to which a shape (tail, eye, nose, etc.) is attached. Sometimes a puppet base also can become the essential shape of the puppet. Take the "Paint Brush" or the "Snail" puppets, for example, whose appearances are determined primarily by their shape. Both paper talker hinge puppets, the Paint Brush has a "mouth" at the tip of his bristles, while the snail has a paper body which has been curled to form the basic shape of his shell. In each case, the concept of shape, interacting with a basic knowledge of construction, has led to an exciting new puppet model.

This process has not taken hours of shopping, sewing, molding. It is a process based more on the world "as we sense it." Why spend hours trying to mold a snail shell when its approximation in a curled piece of paper captures the essence of Ms. or Mr. Snail in the way it looks and in the fascinating way it moves? The imagination is at work here not only in creating the puppet, but also in demonstrating that what we imagine is often more effective than our attempts to imitate realism or a photographic perfection. To conjure the shape of a snail in a rolled-up piece of paper—and quickly construct such a character so that you can hold it in your hand—is about as close to magic as you can get, particularly when the puppet says hello to the child who sits wide-eyed in response to his greeting.

Working with shapes to make puppets has another simplifying benefit: for many people who generally "don't

like to draw," folding a piece of paper or cutting out a shape of a "wing," for example, is preferable to actually drawing the same wing. "Drawing" implies exactness and limitation, while the cutting and folding of paper allows the imagination to flow more freely. Perhaps the involved action of the hands is more natural than the cerebral fine-tuning required to draw or illustrate on the page. For this reason, using shapes to guide you in the construction process can help free impulses in you to work simply and imaginatively.

In suggesting that you "mold the world as you see it," I am advising teachers to take pride in a creative product that resembles children's art. There is little benefit, particularly on the elementary level, in wrestling with creativity in the arena of "high expectations." If a product is too beautiful, too stylized, a child who perceives it may raise questions about his own abilities. Your work should reflect a simple charm, a do-ability that engenders a child's overt response: "Hey, that's neat!," not a covert "Gee, that's hard."

## **5. Shapes As Symbols In Puppets**

In terms of learning and exploration, the puppet's symbolic element makes it a powerful instrument. Not because puppets themselves are powerful. But because, through puppets, the world can be presented conceptually in visual SYMBOLS.

Visual symbols are found at the heart of perception. The more visually inclined we are to define the world, the more involved we become in its creation. Columbus' perception that the world was round was at once symbolic and based

on a courageous vision, which had become an alternative to the old way of seeing the world. He had learned to see other possibilities, and he acted on them.

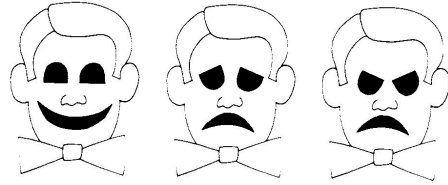
This is not to suggest that by using puppets we will necessarily create more Columbuses (although who knows?). By using puppets, though, teachers can promote a quality of thinking in students that calls on their ability to create and bring the world to life.

- A puppet of the sun introduces a science unit, saying "Hi, I'm the sun. Who remembers how I make plants grow?"
- A rock awakens in the hand of a museum volunteer, and yawns to introduce a tour on geology and earth ages.
- An angry puppet face is a symbol for angry feelings.
- A pyramid puppet is made to symbolize a historic event; the same puppet is used as a symbol to visually reinforce material which children read, or the instructor presents.

All puppets do not become symbols by virtue of their shapes, but a puppet's shape very often can lead the user toward a potential use or conceptual purpose.

As visual symbols, puppets enhance communication because children readily remember what they have processed, associating what they hear the puppet say with what they see in the animated visual symbol. In this process, the visual element combines with the conceptual element to form a potent blend of visual education.

children to express their feelings. A puppet whose



Also as symbols, puppets can be made to represent many aspects of a child's personal experience. A cardboard puppet head like Mr. or Ms. Feeling Face whose moveable eyes and mouth can be turned upside down to change expression (happy, sad, angry, evil), can be used to encourage children to express their feelings. A puppet whose big ears symbolize good listening encourages children to perk up when the puppet appears in the teacher's hand.

Organizations can reach people personally through puppet representations of their logos. A school, whose symbol is an apple, can send a pattern of the puppet home to parents, who may construct the puppet at home with the child. The puppet can then be used as a communication vehicle between school and home, and in time can become an established link for unifying activities, events, and values.

## 6. EXAGGERATION

Tying into all elements thus far—three-dimension, movement, color, form and symbol—the element of exaggeration introduces "seasoning," playfulness, and spontaneity to these and other qualities we will explore.

Exaggerated Color: A BRIGHT GREEN frog literally leaps from the pages of your book;

Exaggerated Movement: a breathless butterfly moves its wings **QUICKLY**.

Exaggerated Sound: a little mouse **WHISPERS** because it is afraid of loud noises;

Exaggerated Form: the **BIG EARS** worn by Phil Phonics symbolize good listening skills.

Exaggeration is the foot-loose and fanciful quality in puppets, loved by young and old alike, that makes them fun, dramatic, memorable and magical. Children are mesmerized by the giant ears on your rabbit puppet. Teenagers enjoy strange voices, erratic movements and odd-shaped puppets with lots of detail. Exaggeration invites a boldness to emerge that ignores the presence of the "Censor." Adults are quick to pick up on this quality in making and using puppets because it is an avenue, in a manner of speaking, that lets them "out of school."

The element of exaggeration will also be found in forming a puppet's self-portrait or character. A "[Personality Sketch](#)" is used as a structure to help define the role and personality of a puppet character. A personality sketch includes a puppet's point of view, taste in clothing, humor, interests, personal history and pet phrases. The element of exaggeration affects other special qualities examined separately in the Communication session which relate specifically to bringing a puppet to life: Voice, Character, Movement and Appearance. Knowledge of exaggeration can influence all of these

to enhance the communication effectiveness of the puppets you use.

## 7. Puppets Are Creatures Of Dimension

### Inside

Beyond the obvious three-dimensions of a puppet, there is a gray area, a twilight zone in a puppet into which both user and watcher are transported and transfixed. There is a point at which every non-believer in a puppet's realness returns the puppet's "hello." It is at this point that a puppet's DIMENSION becomes a channel, a means for traveling through the puppet into oneself and others; when voices, movements, and verbalizations emerge from places hitherto unknown to yourself. Puppet in hand, you are suddenly a mouse, with tiny voice, quick movements and a constant craving for bleu-cheese. "Why Bleu Cheese?" asks the child with a scrunched-up face expressing unequivocal distaste for bleu-cheese. A glance at the mouse in his blue construction paper form prompts the obvious answer from the adult, who is thankful that puppet-thoughts make beautiful common sense. A puppet's dimension allows you the luxury of a free trip to the edge of the mind's frontier: discovery and exploration of the imagination.

Spontaneity, warmth and humor, as the above example also suggests, are by-products of puppetry's dimension. Today's communicator, by contrast, often works with a vast array of materials, most of which have been carefully prepared, produced, and packaged. Everything is perfect, programmed, systematized and sequenced. The voice on the cassette,

the cards in the box, the directions for use, the next “standard of learning” you are expected to teach. Where in the land of Teflon curriculum aids and state-mandated text is there room for you—the individual—to feel personal teaching strengths (and weaknesses)? What kinds of materials can you use that actually enhance personal and professional growth in communication? What materials draw you out, feed your spirit? The packaged programs and approaches promote the tendency to become impersonal and void of character.

### **Outside**

A puppet's dimension also allows for the exploration of "outer spaces." Through a puppet, the user moves into new realms created by the merging of knowledge and imagination. A puppet-explorer has discovered a new land. In the child's hand, the puppet describes the people who live there, the food they eat, the land and the climate. Even the "adult" imagination is charged as the child extends himself—body, mind, feeling and spirit—through the puppet. This act of learning is shared between all those who are involved; it is active and exciting as reflected in the silence of an attentive group much more inclined to listen to the flow of a student's story; and it is fun.

Dimension in the puppet sets free the imagination and magically motivates children and adults who are attracted to puppets and credit them with real and believable personalities. Children confide in puppets and will very often do something to please a puppet that they would not do for another child or adult. Dimension is this bond of trust.

Dimension is at the heart of this motivational power.

Dimension is what makes a small hand puppet larger than life in the eyes of the beholder. Dimension removes the user by illusion from the typical communications process and pathway, regardless of whether puppet and user are visible together. Especially for the teacher or parent always held in check by the yoke of authority, the dimension of puppetry places you less in control and more in the realm of the child who requires the freedom of play, equality and a sense of relating that does not impose on or overshadow his realm.

Removing authority and introducing play frees the relationship, gets the imagination moving and enhances levels of trust and motivation in the learning environment. Use of the puppet can quickly break down resistances or encourage responsibility that might otherwise take weeks. Time is saved; the learning climate warmed.

In a Language Arts lesson on vocabulary development, I once observed a class of third grade Spanish-speaking children who were reluctant to read aloud sentences they had written in English. Few hands went up in response to the teacher's request for readers. Understandably, the children were shy and afraid that they would mispronounce their newly-learned English words. Then the teacher took her paper frog puppet in hand. Suddenly, he was whispering in her ear and she was whispering in his. In doing this, the teacher disengaged from the stalemate.

"Victor is volunteering to be tickled by anyone who reads one sentence," announced the teacher. Hands filled the air. As you might imagine, more than just one sentence was read aloud. Both children and teacher had fun doing it, as Victor made his way around the room with laughs, quips and comments that paced the exercise and held everyone's attention.

Dimension in puppetry is not determined by puppet size or puppet setting. The simplest finger puppet, the most dilapidated paper puppet used right on the end of the hand, can be as powerful as the \$300.00 hand-sewn creation which appears from behind an elaborate stage-setting.

### **And Somewhere 'In -Between'**

Since puppets work in almost any setting, we are justified in attributing to them a dimension that encompasses the tangible and intangible. It is that "something" waiting to be given "life" by the people who come in contact with it. It is personal, interpersonal, physical, metaphysical, motor, social, a product of the mind. Advances in thinking, the stuff of breakthroughs, as we sometimes refer to them, are composed of this imaginative quality of thought. More of our learning, teaching and communicating needs this special element that puppets can foster easily and spontaneously.

Using puppets to explore both inner (personal) spaces and outer (world) spaces can lead the user to extend self-knowledge and self-expression. It can also help to merge, unify and simplify the conceptual world in which we work as teachers and communicators. It can lead children to see the world as an

integrated "whole," rather than a series of fragmented subjects. Respectively, these are the PERSONAL element and the INTEGRATING element of puppetry.

## **8. Puppets Are Personal**

Let's look first at the PERSONAL element. Puppets are animated by the person who makes them, and brings them to life. If a degree of personal and emotional involvement is critical to effective communication, the puppet can only enhance involvement.

Puppets captivate people because, unlike many other forms of media, the puppet-user does not remove him- or herself from the communication medium. Still in control, the user permits a focus—a concentration of experience—to emerge and unfold through interpersonal dynamics. As in the case of Victor described above, this concentration of experience is, for child and adult, challenging and entertaining. Not only enthralled by puppets at work, a group of children looks to the puppet-user for continued stimulation, direction and control—play energy in puppets that enhance the communications experience for the user.

Puppets do this by virtue of the fact that they can be tied to the user's and the receiver's own personal tastes, and the puppet-maker's own sense of creation. Whether you are on the giving or receiving end, puppets can be tailored to individual tastes and needs. For example, if you enjoy hiking, cooking, telling jokes, hobbies, reading, music, etc., then use puppetry as a vehicle through which your own - or that of another's - personal tastes and



interests can become part of your work. This adds a personal dimension to your work; work that can be made more satisfying because it has room for personal expression.

If you have a flair for cooking, create an alter ego puppet who is a chef and loves to set examples of organization, attention to detail, quality and execution in his culinary misadventures.

If you enjoy the outdoors, create a puppet who breathes your love of fresh air, who cares about the environment, is conscious of safety and pays special attention to the variety of natural life forms all around him.

In this vein, a puppet is like a true friend who emerges through your personal interests and shares your values. The puppet can say things openly, directly, dramatically that you might by yourself not say. Here's one example of what I mean. Fed up with undue noise and activity in her class, a second-grade teacher seizes a familiar classroom puppet, a red Mop-Hound, and explodes in a series of angry barks and growls. Surprising not only the class but also herself, the teacher has chosen a natural, spontaneous, stress-relieving way to get the point across to the children that she is angry and frustrated.

"Gee, I guess Sandy got upset with all the noise. Let's help him settle down." They get the point. It has been delivered to them in a manner different from that of the usual verbal scolding. Nor does it sound like many of the other lectures she has given them repeatedly. This time she is expressing her anger on a level that the children immediately grasp and understand. "That happens to

my dog, too, Miss Miller." There is empathy in the air. A change in voice suddenly occurred and her acting comes from a place which is familiar to the children she must reach. But the Mop-Hound is her advocate, whom the children readily accept as opposed to "respect."

The same puppet can tickle, tap, or kiss a child; raise a funny voice to correct or discipline a child without embarrassing him. No other medium for communication allows adults the freedom to touch and hug and kiss—and have it remain warm and appropriate. Even older children will respond to this highly motivational quality in puppets. It is one thing, for example to convey information to young people. It is another thing to reach them emotionally. Unlike advertising, puppets can engage and challenge an audience in non-threatening ways. Learning takes place in a relaxed manner and allows people to do their own thinking. No other medium allows you so much flexibility—so much opportunity—to combine personal interests with educational delivery.

## **9. Puppets Are Natural Integrators**

If puppets connect personally within the people who use them, they also connect readily with the world at large. This INTEGRABILITY is one of puppetry's most remarkable qualities. The integrating element is what makes it so easy to use puppets in so many situations. Whether in the classroom, a hospital pediatrics ward, a museum workshop room or a therapist's office, puppets integrate space, time, subject

and materials. The rehabilitation therapist who has been using puppets for both staff-development and patient therapy suddenly switches emphasis from the medium's rehabilitation role to public relations when a TV news reporter comes to cover her program.

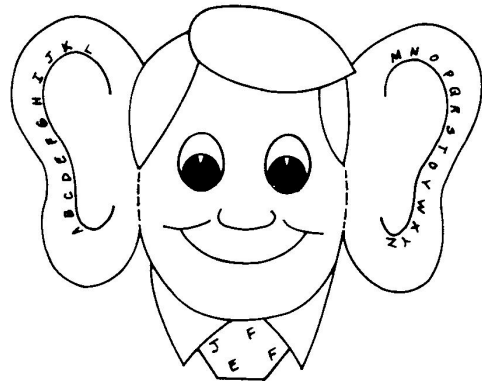
By stressing the role of the puppets in her program during the interview and the tour, she will engage the interest of the reporter in a highly graphic, visual and demonstrable way not normally available to therapists. The presence of puppets adds life and color to the segment the reporter is preparing.

This may result in more in-depth questions, more air-time for the segment, more response from the viewing community, turning mediocre coverage to dramatic and more effective public relations.

Puppets help span, integrate and unify school curriculum. In this way, a puppet is the most versatile of teaching tools, adapting naturally wherever it makes contact. Unlike some curriculum aids or packages, a puppet's use is not limited to just one subject or area of study. A bird puppet with wings that really move, for example, can serve as the subject of a science unit, be adopted as the symbol of a local clean-up program, become a visitor from another country, be used as a mood-setter for a classroom quiet activity, be the harbinger of spring, or a safety messenger.

Puppets also integrate subject matter with value reinforcement. One second-grade teacher uses 'Phil Phonics.' "Philomena" is an option. Sporting a letter-decorated tie and exaggerated ears to catch letter sounds, Phil is used

as a supplement to a reading exercise on letter identification and sound discrimination in which the teacher regularly uses books and letter cards.



She also uses Phil as an example of someone who really likes letter sounds and loves to read. Phil's big ears make him a good listener, too, and he encourages children to show him their good listening habits. Phil's name, his features and the letters on his tie, which the children can identify, are integrated symbols that draw attention to the skills that are the focus of the lesson.

Another facet of a puppet's versatility is its natural ability to work with other teaching or support materials such as books, posters, maps, games, exercises, cassettes, filmstrips, computers and arts and crafts supplies. Through puppets, the life and effectiveness of support materials can be enhanced and extended. Your favorite poster character can become an active participant in upcoming programs. The school bus on your bulletin board, whose passengers can be seen in the windows, can really move with tape tabs and tongue depressors. Christopher Columbus can instantly replay his voyage against the backdrop of a map or slide program. In the hand of child or adult, Columbus can return after the

lesson to answer questions or facilitate a transition by introducing a unit on inventors or scientists.

Storybook figures, as we have shown earlier, can literally come to life with a puppet that jumps right out of the book itself. Later the same puppet can be included in other areas of learning. For example, a popular puppet from the story read on Monday returns to introduce a writing exercise on Wednesday, telling the children some of his favorite words. The use of puppets in conjunction with these resources artfully increases their value and effectiveness.

Puppets help integrate learning processes such as oral expression, comprehension and retention of knowledge. In one sixth-grade class, students researched famous historical figures and incorporated the information they found into dramatic oral presentations using puppets. For these children the use of puppets helped bring history to life in the form of characters who gave "real life" descriptions of their time. These descriptions emerged through the imagination and knowledge of the children as they used their puppets.

## 10. Puppet Process

When you bring together the puppetry elements—three-dimension, movement, color, exaggeration, personal and integrative dimension—you realize that puppets are actually a way of learning unto themselves. This quality in puppets, which calls upon our special faculties of intelligence and imagination, makes puppetry an ideal PROCESSOR for staff development, program development and group exploration.

Above all, to be effective, learning should be playful, free-spirited, and spontaneous. If puppets offer anything, they offer these vital qualities. Puppets, however, offer more than themselves as tools with a peculiar set of characteristics. Just their presence alone in a particular setting can be enough to make a significant difference in the way people feel about their work.

A good case in point is a hospital rehabilitation program for brain-injured victims of car accidents. A program dealing with the unique problems of brain-injured patients and their families places enormous stress on its staff and volunteers who work day by day with patients who can barely respond; whose traumatized families remember loved ones—some of them teenagers—only days before an accident in the flower of their youth. It takes courage to face such people every day, while working to break through the neurologically imprisoned bodies and minds of the patients.

While the use of puppets may or may not be able to contribute to the staff's effort in the sensory stimulation of patients, they will definitely have an impact on the work and feelings of the staff itself. In an effort to stem staff burn-out and volunteer turnover, the program director begins using puppets first for staff itself.

In a series of puppet workshops and user group meetings, her staff familiarizes itself with puppets, making them, playing with them, toying with possibilities. Puppets here are employed as a process. On the basis of this experience, especially if the work is encouraged and continued, a

therapeutic milieu is created. The process through puppets serves to allow the staff to distance itself in a healthy, creative way from the harsh job realities.

The presence of puppets serves as balm on an open wound. Eventually, applications and techniques involving the patients may come about once the staff becomes familiar with the medium. But right now, puppets have served to release tension, provide a buffer and process through which the needs of staff can be addressed creatively.

Because they possess these numerable qualities so useful to teaching and learning, puppets are ultimately more than just another available alternative. Compared to all other materials used by people in a teaching and learning situation including film, music, books, chalk—virtually any media which passes through the hand for instructional purposes—puppets not only improve our work with all of these, but prove themselves time and again the superlative communication medium. Proof of this assertion rests with growing numbers of people using puppets.

"If puppets are potentially THAT good," you might be tempted to ask, "then why don't more teachers and communicators put them to work?"

In part it is because puppets are perceived as theater. The assumption prevails that they will take too much time; that art or theater background is required to use them the right way; that puppetry cannot possibly be a priority when there is so little time for the hard business of learning.

But children are less likely to learn the basics if they are taught in such a way that goes counter to their natural

sensitivity as thinking children. There is a tendency to focus on the "basics" like a myopic dog that chases one scent and one scent only: that of his master. The basics are important and can be learned, if, in the process of education, the child has learning experiences that focus beyond the basics, but which necessarily call upon their use and mastery.

If all that is focused on are "the basics," educators are not meeting their responsibilities, which include stimulating children to question, to dream and to see possibilities in themselves and the world beyond their current grasp. This means that teachers must keep in touch with themselves and find ways to nourish their love for teaching. The hand-held language inherent in puppet media is one such creative way.

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