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# Puppetry and art education: a personal journey

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PUPPETRY AND ART EDUCATION:  
A PERSONAL JOURNEY

by

Buffy Serene Quintero

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Masters degree in Art (Art Education)  
in the Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

May 2011

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Steve McGuire

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Graduate College  
The University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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MASTER'S THESIS

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This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Buffy Serene Quintero

has been approved by the Examining Committee  
for the thesis requirement for the Master of  
Arts degree in Art (Art Education) at the  
May 2011 graduation.

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I also owe much gratitude to my mother, Sandra. She has always believed in me and nurtured my creative spirit. Her friendship with Monica Leo provided me with my first exposure to the world of puppetry. I am deeply indebted, in countless ways, to my mother and Monica. Their lives have been examples to me of how to live a creative and fulfilling life. Their struggles and achievements as artists and women coming of age in the 60's and 70's paved the way for the opportunities I have had as a woman, artist, educator, mother, and scholar.

Thank you to my children, Elliott and Thisbe. Their births made me re-examine my life and my priorities and gave me the courage to envision the person I wanted to be. I hope that the changes I have made in my life will give them the courage to follow their passions. Last but not least, thank you to my husband, Ben, who loves and believes in me unconditionally.

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## PREFACE

On August 17, 2008, we celebrated my son's third birthday with an elaborate birthday party. At that time I was a full-time working mom with a three-year-old son and a six-month year old daughter, striving to find the elusive work/life balance. The birthday party was crazy and chaotic, as children's birthday parties are, but it sparked an artistic awakening in me. On a hot and sticky August day in Iowa, children made monster hats and then paraded around the neighborhood to accordion music played by my father-in-law. We staged a puppet performance of Where the Wild Things Are, based on the children's book by Maurice Sendak, in our backyard. I performed the Max puppet, my friends and relatives wore "wild thing" masks and costumes and emerged from our garden when Max arrived at where the wild things are, and other relatives accompanied the story on the penny whistle, viola, and clarinet. As I prepared for this celebration, I realized that I wanted to do this kind of work on a daily basis: to bring people together to make art, build community, tell stories, and encourage the imagination and creativity of young children (including my own).

Fast-forward one year, on August 17 of 2009, my four year-old son, eighteen month-old daughter, husband, and mother were returning from a month-long trip to Germany. I was returning to Iowa to a new start in life: I had resigned from my full-time job, would be completing an MA in art education focusing on using puppetry arts in educational settings, and would spend more time with my two young children.

## CHAPTER I

### ART TEACHER AS PUPPETEER

#### **Researching Puppets:**

The puppeteer, through his/her own imagination, creates magical self-contained worlds on the puppet stage. Puppetry is a combination of theater arts, visual arts, storytelling, and often times music. This art form, with rich histories spanning across various cultures, has transforming effects on students engaged with the art form. Unfortunately, a scant amount of contemporary research has been done on puppetry arts and puppetry arts in educational settings. The aim of this thesis is to add to the body of puppetry arts research. In conducting my research for this thesis, I worked to develop, from start to finish, a puppet performance. My work included writing the script, building the puppets, props, and stage, practicing, and performing. The two primary reasons for this undertaking included: to build my skills and confidence as a puppeteer, and be able to better teach children in art making experiences in puppetry arts. Simultaneously while honing my own artistic craft, I conducted a primary source interview with a professional puppeteer; long-time friend and mentor, Monica Leo, to better understand the philosophical underpinnings of the practice, the realities of the profession, and for guidance in developing my own performance. I also researched the writings of other puppeteers and scholars to better understand puppetry as a form of art, the history of puppetry, how it has been used in educational settings, and technical aspects related to practicing puppetry. The second part of my thesis research involved teaching a two-week enrichment program to children between ages seven and eleven years old focusing on

puppetry arts. I used this experience to put my theories on teaching into practice and as an opportunity to reflect on my teaching methods.

### **A Puppeteer Next Door:**

My personal history with puppetry began as a four year-old. My mother and I lived next door to Monica Leo, freelance artist and puppeteer. Eulenspiegel Puppets is Monica's professional puppetry company, currently based in West Liberty, Iowa. Her house was a magical place for a young girl. I remember my mother and her talking about art and puppetry over a cup of coffee at her big claw-foot oak table in her kitchen while I dusted and arranged the mouse house. The mouse house was a dollhouse that Monica had made and furnished with handmade furniture and small stuffed mice and rabbits that she made. It was its own self-contained world that I slipped into as arranged the furniture and played with the toys. Colorful handmade masks of devilish creatures hung on her bathroom wall, bunnies had the run of her house, a green bird and a cockatoo squawked in a golden cage, and an old wooden curio cabinet with glass doors displayed a collection of dolls and toys from around the world – her house was a place of wonderment. But the most extraordinary place was hidden down an old wooden staircase - Monica's workshop, her place for creating her puppets and dolls. A wood-burning stove emitted a strong campfire smell. I wanted to spend all day exploring her stacks of fabrics in all kinds of beautiful colors and patterns, and dig through the sliding drawers full of colorful ribbons and shining buttons. Monica's profession allowed her to move between the real world and imaginary worlds created through puppetry. These early experiences of spending time at Monica's workshop, and being an audience member during her shows made a lasting impression on me. As I have matured through life I have not lost my

fascination with puppetry and the imaginary worlds the puppeteer creates to delight, entertain, and provoke.

### **Inspirational Work of Puppeteers:**

My preliminary thesis work began in a graduate seminar I took in the spring of 2010, *Research in the Arts and Humanities*, taught by Dr. Rachel Williams. The class focused on art-based research practices. The course began with reading Elliot Eisner's article "Art and Knowledge," a foundational work in arts-based research. In the article, Eisner makes a compelling argument that art is a form of knowledge and as such should be recognized as a legitimate form of scholarly inquiry in research in academia.

Throughout the semester we grappled with questions related to using art as a tool for academic inquiry. This course provided the support and encouragement I needed to begin exploring puppetry in a way that was self-reflective, and allowed me to question how puppetry could inform my scholarly research and influence my teaching. My final project was a puppetry performance, which included developing a script, building puppets, scenery, and a stage, rehearsing, and performing. Early on in the project, I met with my longtime friend and mentor, Monica Leo, to get advice on the undertaking.

On a balmy March day in 2010, I drove out to the Owl Glass Puppetry Center in West Liberty, Iowa to meet with Monica Leo. The two large storefront windows had displays of her familiar puppets. Once inside, I felt instantly inspired. Posters of past performances, hand printed woodcuts by Leo, hung on butter-colored walls, an antique miniature puppet stage sat on an old trunk next to a comfortably worn sofa, and books on puppetry lined the back wall next to the desk. She scrambled around to finish up some work and introduced me to her outreach coordinator. After offering me a cup of coffee,

we sat down to discuss her personal journey as a professional puppeteer and freelance artist. The pragmatic side of me was also very interested in getting advice on the technical aspects of building and staging a show.

**Monica Leo – Freelance Artist and Puppeteer:**

Leo has been building puppets and dolls for over 40 years and has been performing for 35. Her parents were German refugees during WWII, and one of the first things they sent home for was a set of hand-built hand puppets. Leo's father, a minister, would perform shows for his children, sparking young Monica's interest in puppetry. After attending art school in Düsseldorf, Germany, she looked to find some way that she could make art and earn a living. She found her answer in puppetry.

One of the most inspiring parts of our conversation occurred when Leo talked about the importance of having faith – believing in yourself and in your art. Being a freelance artist is a difficult thing to do, it does not provide the same type of stability and steady stream of income that more traditional occupations provide. She added, “you need to be able to add and subtract to pay the bills, but you also need to have faith that things will work out.”<sup>1</sup> Leo enjoys the widely varied aspects of the profession, including performing, creating visual work, music, acting, brainstorming new ideas, and working with all sorts of different types of people. Although there are aspects she could do without, like paperwork and promotion.

In 1989, with encouragement from the Iowa Arts Council, in addition to being a for-profit partnership, she established a non-profit dimension to Eulenspiegel Puppets. This part of the organization is associated with their public outreach and includes the

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<sup>1</sup> Leo, interview by author.

West Liberty Children's Festival, performance in the park, the Muscatine County parade, family fun workshops, and a summer camp for children. This development added a board of directors, which has helped her realize the importance of Eulenspiegel as a service organization and brought more community involvement for the organization.

In 1995 Eulenspiegel purchased an old storefront in downtown West Liberty, Iowa to open up a puppetry center. Leo was searching for something they could purchase, but real estate was too expensive in Iowa City. One afternoon her husband, who has a strong affinity towards Mexican culture, was in a bar in West Liberty, Iowa. The bar owner told him the building next door was for sale. Eulenspiegel purchased the building for \$16,000. After a great deal of work, Owl Glass Puppetry Center opened its doors one year later in 1996.

### **Community Involvement and Social Justice:**

Leo has a strong philosophy related to community involvement. She looks to the In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theater in Minneapolis as a model center. My first exposure to the theater was in 1993 as a high school student, I attended a performance of Befriended by the Enemy, based on the true story of a Jewish family, the Weisners, in Lincoln Nebraska, who taking in their enemy- an ailing Klu Klux Klan ex-Grand Dragon, Larry Trapp. The show, co-created by Sandy Spieler and Esther Ouray, used Bunraku-style puppets for the main characters and larger than life angle puppets. George Latshaw discusses the angles in this performance in Theater of Wonder: 25

### Years In the Heart of the Beast:

At various stages of Trapp's atonement, he is attended by angels. These magnificent beings came from behind the audience and moved down the aisles to reach the stage. Majestic in long robes with fulsome white wings, elongated necks, and African facial features painted in heavenly blue, they were a vision of

extraordinary beauty, dignity, and tenderness. When they stood on stage, they almost brushed the proscenium arch above their heads, making a truly impressive sight.<sup>2</sup>

What made the performance a piece of artistic mastery was not only the amazingly crafted and manipulated puppets, but also the content of the performance which explored issues of racism, bigotry, violence, forgiveness, and atonement. In the Heart of the Beast Theatre tackles social and political issues in their performances. Theater of Wonder: 25 Years In the Heart of the Beast is a collection of articles by puppeteers and artists who have had contact with the In the Heart of the Beast theater over the last twenty-five years.

<sup>3</sup> It is an illuminating source in understanding the history of the theatre, from its humble beginnings in the basement of the Walker Church in Minneapolis to the Avalon Theatre, where it stands now, in an economically depressed neighborhood in south Minneapolis. Sandy Spieler, artistic director that has been with the theatre since its formative years, writes about the theatre's history and vision:

The vision of the theatre revolves around the complex dialogue of our times and the joyful invention of puppets. The history of In the Heart of the Beast revolves around many, many people who have and envisioned and enacted the work of the theatre with great passionate energy.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Latshaw, "Twenty-five Hearty Cheers for the Birthday Beast: Sparklers for Spieler and Company," in Theatre of Wonder: 25 Years in the Heart of the Beast, 13.

<sup>3</sup> Theater of Wonder: 25 Years In the Heart of the Beast contains contributions by Colleen J. Sheehy, George Latshaw, David O'Fallon (one of the founding members of the theatre), Martha Boesing, Florence Chard Dacey, Debra Fraiser, Roy McBride, and Sandy Spieler (current artistic director). The book also contains colored plates of the theatre's puppets and masks and a chronology of the history of the theatre's performances.

<sup>4</sup> Spieler, "From the Mud – Puppets from the Pulse – Song: 25 Years of Puppet Theatre on East Lake Street," in Theatre of Wonder: 25 Years in the Heart of the Beast, 41.

Leo's philosophy is in line with In the Heart of the Beast in that she believes in community building through puppetry arts and that puppetry can be a means of addressing issues of social justice. Rikki Asher recently researched puppetry arts as a mode of addressing social justice issues. Her article "Radical Puppets and the Language of Art" argues that radical puppets have the ability to easily communicate social issues to all members of the community. Asher article contains a brief, but well-researched, section on "historical and contemporary political puppets." During this section she touches upon the work of In the Heart of the Beast, the center Leo cited as a model center. Asher also outlines "Art in the Classroom," a university-level course she instructed, which featured puppetry's historical context, the inclusion of social justice issues in the classroom, and construction techniques that "tapped into collective creativity of cooperative learning."<sup>5</sup> The class culminated in a performance based on ideas of conservation, education, and protection of our oceans. Students created giant parade puppets of Mother Nature and sea creatures that they performed with at an open-air stage in a city park, complete with drums. Asher's article is also an excellent example of theory in practice, in that it discusses in real and practical terms how she implemented her ideas on radical puppetry into a college level education course.

One show in particular in Leo's repertoire addresses issues of social justice, Immigrant Stew at the Chat and Chew. Leo describes it as a "humorous, touching, and quite timely as we welcome immigrants into the rural Midwest."<sup>6</sup> Cathy Schmidt-McGillicutty, played by Leo, is the proprietress of the local cafe, the Chat 'N' Chew.

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<sup>5</sup> Asher, "Radical Puppets and the Language of Art," 8.

<sup>6</sup> Leo. Text obtained from Eulenspiegel Website, [puppetspuppets.com](http://puppetspuppets.com).

She's upset because her daughter wants to marry a member of a Mexican immigrant family. She confronts her prejudice as flashbacks play out scenes from her own family history. This is a community show, in that Leo works as an artist-in-residence to work with groups to rehearse and perform the show. The flashbacks are performed by older children or adults from various communities to an accompaniment of music by Ron Hillis.

### **Puppetry in Education:**

Leo and I also discussed the benefits of using puppetry in traditional educational settings, like public schools. She has worked as an artist-in-residence at many schools. She sees the main benefit of children working as puppeteers is the pure joy of creating something. Beyond that, puppetry stimulates higher-level thinking. Children have to solve many problems when planning how to stage their show. One noteworthy contemporary source to address puppetry in educational setting is the collection of articles in Puppetry in Education and Therapy.<sup>7</sup> Tova Ackerman's article in the collection, "The Puppet as Metaphor," discusses puppetry as a metaphor and all the philosophical implications that go along with this thesis. Ackerman holds an Ed. D. in Administration and Teaching English as a Second Language. Her background in English language learning comes through in the article. On puppet performance, she writes:

Its [the puppet's] personality comes from some part of the puppeteer that is dominant enough for it to have been created as a concrete visualization. It is a statement of thoughts that may not have been consciously expressed; here, those thoughts are not only stated, but stated strongly. This aspect of puppetry makes it

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<sup>7</sup> The text contains a collection of articles by puppeteers and scholars. The text has two sections, one on puppetry in educational settings and the other on puppetry and therapy.

a dynamic tool for developing language communication skills with both children and adults.<sup>8</sup>

Ackerman underscores that puppetry, an inherently performance-based media, can be powerful tool for literacy development and language development. In my own work, I have had success in using puppetry as a means to reinforce second language skills. In the summer of 2009, I received a grant from the Japan Foundation to pilot a Japanese Language and Puppetry Arts Camp for children in 4<sup>th</sup>- 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Students were introduced to the basics of Japanese language and culture. They also worked with Martin Holman, faculty at the University of Missouri and professional puppeteer, to stage their own Bunraku performances. Visual and oral aspects of puppetry make it a strong medium for aiding in language acquisition. Also, almost every culture has a strong history of puppetry arts that can be tapped in discussing culture in conjunction with language learning. I am curious about intersections between art and culture, and find puppetry to be a powerful art form to use in exploring these intersections.

Ackerman also introduces the idea of puppets, sometimes merely simple scraps of cloth, as a crystallization of more complex ideas. Her article dances around the idea of puppetry as poetry. This a powerful way of thinking about puppetry, which is something to be conscious of while creating puppet performances and working with others to in developing their own ideas into puppets and performances.

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<sup>8</sup> Ackerman, "The Puppet as Metaphor," in Puppetry in Education and Therapy, 8.

**Technical Aspects of Puppetry:**

Leo shared with me the technique she uses to make paper-mache puppet heads and for sewing hand puppet bodies and stage construction. Leo has built many different styles of stages to use with her puppets, but often performs with an open proscenium in which the puppeteer is exposed to the audience. She suggested using a playboard, or stage floor, when performing solo. This gives the puppeteer a place to set props while performing. Leo pointed me in the direction of George Latshaw, widely regarded as the dean of American puppetry. Latshaw was instrumental in promoting puppetry in the United States throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His book, Puppetry: The Ultimate Disguise, is considered among the most important English-language works on the subject and offers practical advice for anyone interested in performing with puppets. Lastshaw, who passed away in 2006, was a friend and mentor to Leo.

After our interview, I drove back to Iowa City with much to process and absorb. She shared her story on becoming a freelance artist and puppeteer; her personal philosophical theories of art, puppetry, education, and community involvement; and technical aspects related to developing performances.

## CHAPTER II

### DELVING INTO THE PROCESS

#### **Inspiration Strikes:**

After my interview with Monica Leo I felt encouraged and inspired. Inspiration for the script came to me randomly. At the public library, pursuing the fairytale section, my son randomly pulled a book off the shelf. I did not bother re-shelving it, so I checked it out with a huge stack of books, many of which were beautifully illustrated fairytales that I thought could possibly serve as a basis for my puppet performance. That evening I curled into bed with my two children and read the random book my son had chosen -- Bony Legs, an adaptation of a Baba Yaga tale written by Joanna Cole and illustrated by Dirk Zimmer. The adaption was simple, repetitive, and Baba Yaga had great humorous qualities and characteristics, like pulling her nose and stamping her foot and saying “baaaaaaaah!” when frustrated. The strong visual narration in the story prompted me to say to my children, “This story would make a good puppet show.”

My next step was to research the history of Baba Yaga.<sup>9</sup> I spent hours searching the Internet and found fascinating images of Baba Yaga, poetry, and many visual culture references including cartoons, You-Tube music videos, comics, and an actual cabin on chicken feet that stands outside of Stockholm, Sweden. I also discovered that I was not the first to have the idea of telling a Baba Yaga tale through puppetry. I

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<sup>9</sup> Baba Yaga is a witch-like character in Slavic folktales. In some stories she appears as a positive female life force, while in other versions she is portrayed as an evil witch. Her character is complex and multi-faceted. For more information on Baba Yaga and her cultural significance see Andreas, John. Baba Yaga: The ambiguous mother and witch of Russian folktales. New York: Peter Lange Press, 2004.

found other examples of Baba Yaga puppet productions. Through this research I began to formulate the visual and theatrical aspects of the show.

Eileen Blumenthal's Puppetry: A World History served as a source of inspiration for me, with over 350 exquisite images related to puppetry spanning throughout history and from around the globe. The first chapter provides a brief and concise history of puppetry that dates back to the very beginnings of human civilization but after the first chapter the structure of the book is less conventional, like the art form being discussed. She explores puppetry arts in chapters devoted to topics such as politics, violence, and sex. She also addresses, with specific examples, how puppets have been used as tools for advancing social justice, provided political commentary, and as a means of furthering education.<sup>10</sup>

### **Script Writing and Puppet Building:**

I wrote the script and created the puppets simultaneously. First I decided what puppets I would need. Since I would be performing the show myself, I wrote the script in a way that would require as few scene changes as possible and would use only essential puppets and props. I used the book How to do "The Three Bears" with Two Hands: Performing with Puppets by Walter Minkel as a guide while thinking through the logistics of my show. His book is a guide for a novice performer, specifically geared toward librarians and educators, on how to stage a solo show. It offers advice on writing scripts, choosing stage types, and other dramatic elements that go into developing a

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<sup>10</sup> Blumenthal's book is an excellent survey with a detailed bibliography for those wishing to further explore topics or artists that she mentions. In her extensive research, Blumenthal cites hundreds of specific artists from all parts of the world using a plethora of techniques and performing in a vast array of settings which could be followed-up on to create more in depth studies of these artists.

performance. The advice I gleaned from Leo and from reading Minkel's book steered me in trying to use as few puppets and props as possible. I decided on my puppets: Baba Yaga (the witch), Sasha (the protagonist), a cat, a squirrel, and a talking gate. I sketched the puppets first and then chose fabrics and other materials. A bold paisley print in vibrant colors set against black that reminded me of a modern version of Russian shawls, served as inspiration for the Baba Yaga puppet. A red fabric with a floral print seemed fitting for Sasha. While building the puppets I was conscientious of both the aesthetics of the puppets and props and also their functionality, or how well I could perform with them. I built the puppet heads using paper mache over Styrofoam puppets, making them light weight and easy to manipulate.



Figure 1. Paper mache head of Bony Legs puppet.



Figure 2. “Bony Legs” cast from left to right: Bony Legs, Sasha, Hut on Chicken Feet, Dimitri the Cat.

Simultaneously while I was working on the puppets I wrote a script for the show adapted from Joanna Cole’s Bony Legs. I asked a friend if she would be willing to write songs for the show and perform them on her acoustic guitar. My friend, an elementary teacher, was easily convinced. I promised to perform the show for her students. We rehearsed the show several times on my back porch with my children as the test audience. During our first rehearsal, I did not have the puppets finished, so I used other puppets as stand-ins. I worked on developing the characters, their voices, and their movements. I struggled with performing with the props. I tried out many ways of working with the props and am still refining this aspect of the performance.

**Performing “Bony Legs”:**

After a couple of months of researching, building the stage and puppets, and rehearsing, it was finally time to perform for an audience. The first audience was to be the third and fourth grade students at a local elementary school, where Nevlen teaches. I loaded the stage and puppets into my van and headed for the school. The night before the performance, I stayed up until four in the morning putting finishing touches on the puppets and props.

I performed for over one hundred third and fourth grade students. The students responded with lots of laughs, especially from a boy sitting dead center. Prior to performing I worried that the show might be a show better suited for lower elementary students, but the kids were fully engaged for the whole show. Since students had been studying folktales and had written their own stories with morals at the end, the show served as a great culmination to their unit.

Questions and comments the show prompted the students to ask included:

- “Two things, I am from Russia and my name is Sasha.” (The protagonist in the story’s name is Sasha.)
- Have you done puppet shows before?
- I was in a play about Baba Yaga at the University, and I play the guitar.
- How did you make the puppets?
- Why did you decide to do a puppet show?
- Bony legs could have used her nose to knock down the tree. (Bony Legs does have a big nose, so I thought this was a good idea.)
- What are Bony Legs’ eyes made from?

I deemed the performance successful. The children's laughter and curiosity made me inspired and motivated to continue this work. I had many ideas of how to improve the show and thought of performing it in more places and using the show as a means of motivating students to create their own original work.



Figure 3. Performing “Bony Legs” for 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade students.



Figure 4. Performing “Bony Legs”.

## CHAPTER III

## “LET THE WILD RUMPUS BEGIN”

**Teaching Children Puppetry:**

In the summer of 2010, after creating and performing “Bony Legs,” I taught a two-week enrichment course in the Ames, Iowa Community School District as part of their Super Summer program. The children were ages 7-11. The students and I worked together for 90 minutes each day for two weeks. I described the course in the following way in the promotional materials that advertised the course to parents and children:

Let your imaginations go wild as you bring Where the Wild Things Are to life on the puppet stage! You will create your own hand puppet and paper mask. The class will work together to design and paint the backdrop and props for the show. You will learn the basics of puppet manipulation and staging and then perform the show for parents and supporters on the last day.

The objectives that I cited for the course when I applied to teach were:

1. Explore art materials and creative process through puppetry arts.
2. Increase fine motor development.
3. Develop creative thinking and problem solving skills.
4. Build oral communication and performance skills.

Due to the limited amount of time, I pre-selected the story the students would be performing, rather than having them write their own stories. I would narrate the story in order to give the students cues while performing. I chose Where the Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak, because of poetic text, consisting of only ten sentences and 338 words. Sendak’s work is a masterful crystallization of a young boy testing the boundaries of his autonomy and being lost in his own imagination. Like all great literature, it speaks of universal themes, and is of particular relevance to children in the age group of the class. I

hoped for the students to become intimately familiar with this work, and to make it their own story. They would create all the puppets, props, and scenery for the show.

I also would use my experiences teaching the puppetry class to reflect upon and refine my teaching methodologies. In the coming fall I would be teaching kindergarten through sixth grade art at a private school, and it had been ten years since I taught elementary students as a lead teacher.

I chose to record the experience teaching using auto-ethnographic notes, by recording what the students did each day and how I instructed them. I also recorded my own personal reflections on my teaching after each day. After recording my notes about my teaching experience, I re-read Elliot Eisner's The Arts and the Creation of Mind in an attempt to understand my experiences teaching through the arts through the lens of a leader in the field of art education. I have attempted to make connections between themes or major ideas that arose while I was teaching with concepts discussed by Eisner. I chose this methodological approach in order to be self-reflective about my teaching in hopes of improving and guiding my practice.

### **Teacher's Journal and Reflections – Day One:**

June 7, 2010: Monday - A life-size elf puppet greeted students as they entered the classroom, setting the stage for the magic world of puppetry that they would be engaging with over the next ten days. Next, students introduced themselves; this was a mixed group of students from across the Ames School District. I talked to the students about the important work that we would be engaging in throughout the week, staging our own production of Where the Wild Things Are. The Students seemed excited and asked how we would be doing it. I informed them that we would be creating our own puppets,

learning how to manipulate them, and making masks and scenery. I read the text from Where the Wild Things Are without showing the illustrations. I chose this approach in order to encourage original artwork in representing the characters of the book. Next, students imagined what the “wild things” that Max encountered on his adventure looked like and thought about the setting that the wild things were in. Based on their visualizations, students made oil pastel drawings on 18”x24” pieces of black paper of their “wild things.”

***Teacher reflection:***

I felt nervous about teaching on my first day, especially since it has been so long since I had taught elementary children as the lead classroom teacher. The students and their parents elected to participate in this class, so it made for a group of eager learners.

Eisner devotes part of his book to discussing aspects of teaching that are unique to the arts. He notes, “Because so much of what is important in the arts depends upon the use of the imagination, the ability to engage students’ imagination is critically important skill in art teaching.”<sup>11</sup> Children’s imaginations never cease to amaze me, and the joy of bearing witness to what arises from their imaginations is one of the primary reasons I feel a sense of calling to work as an art educator. Using just the text in introducing the story encouraged the students to use their imagination in creating their own “wild things.” Each student created a drawing that was uniquely his/her own and he/she enjoyed the process of working with the materials. After my first day teaching I felt a sense of relief that everything went so smoothly and that the students had created such exciting work. I host of questions circulated in my head about how the rest of the week would go. As

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<sup>11</sup> Eisner, The Arts and the Creation of Mind,53.

Eisner notes, no matter how much careful planning a teacher does, the final outcomes of teaching can never be fully predicted. He writes about the symbiotic relationship between student and teacher:

The teacher designs environments made up of situations that teachers and students co-construct. Sometimes the major responsibility for their formation resides with the teacher, sometimes with the individual student, often with other students, but the process is never entirely independent; the student always mediates, and hence modifies, what will be received or, better yet, constructed from the situations in which he or she works.<sup>12</sup>

I was curious about how the week would progress and wondered how the performance would develop. I wondered how much the initial drawings would inform the students' puppets and masks. Would the students use the drawings as sketches for their puppets? Would they expand upon their ideas? I thought about my skills as a teacher. I questioned if I was using the most effective strategies in teaching my students how to use the materials and how to work with puppets. I also thought about sequence of the activities and imagined different scenarios of student behavior based on the sequence of activities I guided the students through. I wanted the students to be successful in producing an end product that they would be proud to show their parents.

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<sup>12</sup> Eisner, 47.



Figure 5. Child's oil pastel drawing of "Wild Thing."

### **Teacher's Journal and Reflections – Day Two:**

**June 8, 2010: Tuesday** - Students finished their oil pastel drawings, and then they were hung around the room. The drawings served as references and helped set an atmosphere as they developed their puppets and masks. Displaying the art also allowed other students to get ideas from each other's work. After finishing their drawings, we worked on puppet manipulation. Each student selected a hand puppet to use from my extensive and diverse collection of hand puppets, many of which were made by Monica Leo. Then using a door puppet theater (made of a two tension rods, with a bottom and top curtain complete with silver stars on the curtains), the students practiced puppet manipulation in groups of two. Using controlled movements the students made their puppets walk, run, sleep, wake, and enter and exit the stage. The children watched each

other perform intently and delighted in performing for each other. I talked to the students about the importance of making the movements precise and not rushed.

The day concluded with the students creating the base from which they would create their puppet heads. I asked the students who would want to play the role of Max and make the Max puppet. Only three students wanted to be Max. I wrote their names on paper and then drew one the name of one student to play the lead role. I demonstrated creating the puppet heads by crumpling a piece of newspaper and then fashioning the newspaper around my index finger to make the hole for the hand puppet. Next I wrapped masking my around the newspaper head, covering all of the newspaper with pieces of tape. Some students struggled with making their heads because their fine motor skills were not developed enough to manage the tape and hold the heads. I was grateful to have had an adult volunteer to help with this step of the process.

***Teacher reflection:***

The students seemed to delight in having a chance to perform for each other with the puppets and liked having the opportunity to self-select a puppet character. The door puppet theater is small; so only two students could be behind it at a time. If I were working with a larger group of students, I would use one of the larger stages so that more students could be behind the stage at a time.

I felt confident in teaching puppet manipulation and how to make the base of the puppet heads. I have taught this technique several times in the past, and continue to refine the technique. Eisner also identifies teachers' knowledge of technical requirements to the use of materials as an aspect of teaching unique to teaching art. <sup>13</sup> Understanding

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<sup>13</sup> Eisner, 33.

how to use the materials and showing students how to use them allows students to achieve their desired results without becoming too frustrated with the materials. Although, I am not opposed to some struggle by which students make their own discoveries. Making the newspaper head bases covered with tape was difficult for some of the students because they had a hard time manipulating the long pieces of tape. Perhaps I could figure out a technique that could make this easier for the students. Maybe they could work in pairs, or perhaps having extra adult volunteers when working with younger students is the best solution.

### **Teacher's Journal and Reflections – Day Three:**

**June 9, 2010: Wednesday** - After a brainstorming discussion about what kind of features a “wild thing” might have, students used newspaper and tag board to build up their puppet heads. The children added ears, eyes, fangs, a unicorn horn, trunks, and mouths. By not making this a rushed process, student naturally wandered around to see what their peers were doing, which resulted in them coming up with more ideas about what could be added to their puppets.

I demonstrated how to cover the heads with plaster bandages by moistening strips of bandages in warm water and then laying the strips flat over the head of the puppet until the entire head has been covered with three layers. I pre-cut the bandages into strips to simplify the process for the students. After a demonstration, the students began layering plaster bandages on their bases. Again, I had an adult volunteer helping with this step of the process. The students worked in silence, completely engrossed and engaged with their work.

*Teacher reflection:*

Today served as a reminder about how exciting working with new materials can be and that learning how to effectively manipulate a new material is empowering for children, an important concept in planning any type of arts curriculum. Eisner writes about the how choice of material shapes students work and how the child makes the contents of his or her consciousness visual. He writes:

The representational process is normally regarded as a means through which the contents of our consciousness are made public. The conception is all too tidy. We represent not only what we aim at, but also what we discover in the course of the expressive action.<sup>14</sup>

Students began thinking about their “wild thing” creatures by making two-dimensional drawings using oil pastels. These drawings hung around the room as a visual reference while they worked, but as students felt the cold wet texture of the plaster and applied it to their puppet heads, new ideas took shape for horns, ears, and eyes that they may not have envisioned in their initial drawings. Thus, the material helped them to see and express themselves in new ways.

Today also underscored the importance of having proper facilities and giving clear and concise clean-up instructions. The room I was teaching in had no sink, so students had to go in the bathroom to clean up. I did not give instructions on using the bathroom for cleaning up, and in the girls bathroom white plaster had been smeared all over the sink.

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<sup>14</sup> Eisner, 23.

**Teacher's Journal and Reflections – Day Four:**

*June 9, 2010: Thursday* – The children arrived in the room excited about what the day would bring. They were checking over their work from the previous day and curious about what the next steps would be. Most seemed very pleased with how the puppets had turned out. A few had gotten bandages into the holes of their heads, so the finger holes needed to be enlarged slightly.

Today was the day for painting the base coat color of their heads. I planned to give each student one color to paint with. I mixed colors for students that wanted anything besides a primary color. A few of the second grade students seemed to get confused about painting the base coat first and wanted to move on to adding details. I reminded them that they would paint details on the next day. I also had the students paint the base coat on their paper plate masks. They could use the same color or another color. After the experience in the bathroom the previous day, I gave detailed instructions on washing their hands in the sink and rinsing out their paintbrushes.

A number of the students finished painting before the other students. I encouraged them to walk around and look at what their classmates were doing. Students finished at different time. Students who finished first cleaned up, and then were allowed to practice working with the puppets. The students loved using the puppets. They spontaneously were coming up with their own small dialogues/performances. I put the door theater up, and let them perform for each other. I had not planned for this today, but the results were fantastic. One second-grade boy remained in a constant fit of laughter as a witch and clown chased each other and then proceeded to play ball with each other. The session concluded with me reading Where the Wild Things Are again, with the

pretense that they should be thinking about how they would make the story come to life with their puppets. While I read, they also practiced “roaring their terrible roars, and gnashing their terrible teeth.”

***Teacher reflection:***

Today reminded me of the importance of allowing students to be self-sufficient. Especially when working with young students, it is easy to do things for the students because it seems easier for me as the teacher. If I taught this day over again, I would have let the students mix their own colors, especially since it was a small group of students. The adult who was volunteering had recently retired from teaching high school math and also had experience teaching ceramic classes to youth. As a veteran teacher, she allowed students to mix their own colors, which they were doing very successfully. Halfway through, I started giving the students the colors and letting them mix themselves. My experiences today also reminded me to be flexible and that sometimes letting go of control, in the sense that things may take a turn different from what I envision, can lead to excellent results.



Figure 6. Child painting puppet head and mask base colors.

### **Teacher's Journal and Reflections – Day Five:**

**June 10, 2010: Friday** - The first week ended with students painting the details onto their puppets. The student making Max spent a considerable amount of time practicing how to make eyes. I worked one-on-one with the student and used my expertise to help her resolve the problem she was working on. We took time to look closely at what an eye looks like, and I showed her and several other students how to use the end of the paint brush to make a small controlled dot of white in the iris to look like light reflecting in the eye. On this day, unlike the previous day, students worked with an entire palette, instead of just one color. I encouraged them to mix their own colors, which many did with great joy. One student felt frustrated while trying to make brown, but the student finally the found the right balance of red, blue, and yellow to make brown. As students finished, they again “played” with the puppets, which proved to be a great

source of joy for them. Once everyone was finished working, I performed “Bony Legs”. The performance went right up until it was time for them to go, so I didn’t really get a chance to ask them for their feedback or answer questions.

*Teacher reflection:*

I felt anxious about performing for the students. Perhaps it was the combination of feeling responsible for the teaching, material preparation, and classroom management. It takes a lot of mental energy, as does performing a solo puppet show. I also prefer to perform with a musical accompaniment, and feel like the show loses something when it does not have music to go along with it. If I had this to do over again, I would have performed the show earlier in the week, and would have left time after the show to talk to the students about the process I went through to develop the show. I would have also left time to answer any questions they may have had.

Today and the previous day underscored the importance of “play” in the development of students’ imagination. Eisner notes that the arts encourage pursuing the qualitative experience and to engaging in the “constructive exportation of what the imaginative process might engender.” During this unstructured time children delighted in being able to construct their own worlds and dialogues with the puppets. I was reminded of the valuable role unstructured time to “play” or experiment can have on developing and encouraging students’ imaginations.

**Teacher's Journal and Reflections – Day Six:**

*June 14, 2010: Monday* – Students stumbled in at 8:30 after the weekend. Two new volunteers joined our group on this day, two high school volunteers. On this day students picked out a fabric for their bodies, and then had the fabric cut into an eighteen by eighteen inch square. They then used a variety of supplies to add final touches to their puppets: glitter glue, pom poms, fake gemstones, sequins, fake fur, and yarn. I demonstrated wrapping yarn around a piece of cardboard to make pom poms or clumps of hair to put on their puppets. The results included a red bow made from yarn on the side of the head of a brown bear puppet; a head scarf for a cat puppet, a bandana, a beard, whiskers, extra fur on the puppet bodies, to name a few. Some students really went all out with the “bling,” while others were more reserved, and one student opted not to add anything. They could also use the time to add accessories to their masks. These accessories, to both the puppets and the masks, added the finishing touches to their work. They completed this much more quickly than I had anticipated, so I scrambled to find something for them to do. I had not totally thought out a plan for making the backdrop. I did have a black plastic tablecloth and tissue paper. I encouraged those that were done to come over and we began brainstorming ideas for making the backdrop. The class agreed that the backdrop should include a moon, stars, and trees. We started working, but it quickly became apparent that we didn't have all the right supplies, and others needed help with gluing. I scrapped the backdrop idea until the next day, and we did a run through of the puppet show using other puppets. This made apparent all the things that still needed to be done – props, a second stage so everyone could fit behind the stage, and making the stages lower so that the younger girls could fit behind the stage.

***Teacher reflection:***

The day definitely felt the most chaotic of the days, but was a chance to see where more work needed to be done. Going in to this teaching experience I had broad ideas of what I wanted the kids to accomplish, but I did not know exactly how each day would be structured. Each day after teaching I made plans for the next day and tweaked my original plans. Today reinforced the notion that not having a well-thought out plan in teaching can make for a chaotic and unproductive class. Thorough and well thought out planning is essential, but of course one still needs to be flexible and willing to adapt.

Central to any successful teaching is the relationship between student and teacher. I felt like I was creating strong relationships with the students and getting to know them as individuals. Every student was excited about being a part of creating a puppet show. What a luxury to have only fourteen students every day. The small group size also allowed me to let them work on individual projects. One student, who loves to draw, created some of the props – Max in a boat and a dog on a stick. She decided to make these props and figured out how she would do it after we talked about what still needed to be done. Two other girls worked together to make the sign with the title of the show on it to introduce the show. Even though things were not as planned, as I might have liked on this day, it allowed room for the students to take even more ownership of the production. Instead of me telling them what all needed to be done, they had to think critically about the problem and come up with solutions to solve the problem. Sometimes letting go of control can be a good thing, I am still navigating when to have a detailed step-by-step plan for students to follow and when to sit back and give them the tools to

do their own problem solving, which might mean that they take a different approach than I would take.

**Teacher's Journal and Reflections – Day Seven:**

*June 15, 2010: Tuesday* -- A younger boy arrived early, and said, "Good morning, Ms. Quintero. It is almost going to be our puppet show." I said, "You're right! It is going to be in three more days. Do we still have a lot of work to do?" He said, "Yeah." His cheerful disposition, and excitement about the end result, put me in a good mood and excited to continue guiding them to the final outcome: performing for their parents and supporters, bringing their artwork to life, building a sense of community, and allowing their art to not only be something to be proud of, but a social event at the same time. Before class started I made a plan to have the students divide up in two groups to work on making large backdrops on black paper. After we talked about ideas for dressing up their bodies and how to attach the bodies to the heads, I went over the plan for the backdrops. The students would work with one of the high school volunteers to make the backdrop using paper, tissue paper, scissors, glue, and whatever else they needed. This freed me up to help hot gluing additional accessories on the puppets of a few of the students who were still working on their puppets. A more structured day and the tools students needed to get their work done, led to a more productive and less chaotic day.



Figure 7. Child's Max hand puppet.



Figure 8. Child's "Wild Thing" puppet.



Figure 9. Child's "Wild Thing" mask.

**Teacher's Journal and Reflections – Day Eight:**

June 16, 2010: Wednesday – Before class started, the two high school student volunteers hot glued the paper plate masks to paint stirrers. When students arrived their finished puppet and mask laid waiting for them at their desk. The students delighted in seeing the finished end products that they had been working so hard on all week. The students immediately picked up their masks and tried them on. One girl asked how they could see what they looked like. I suggested going in the bathroom and looking in the mirror to see themselves with their masks on. Her and and the other student went into the bathroom, and came back with huge grins. The students regrouped at their desks, and then I assigned them spots behind the puppet stage. All fourteen students crowded behind the stage with genuine joy and excitement to be finally behind the stage they would be using for the performance.

After we determined where everyone would fit behind the stage, students went back to their desks and received their instructions for the day. The day would be spent tying up loose ends: finishing putting puppet bodies together, finishing props and signs, and finishing the backdrop. As a group we went out into the hallway to have a look at the backdrops. The students sat around the backdrop and offer suggestions about what could be added. Comments included: more stars, glitter on the moon, and more flowers along the bottom to unify the two pictures. Then the discussion progressed into talk about adding spaceships and spaceships with wild things in them. (I had not envisioned this for the background, but I encouraged their creativity and imagination.) One student with exceptional artistic sensibilities had very specific ideas about adding glitter to the moon

and starts. She already requested doing this the day before, so I brought in glitter glue for her to use. We went back into the room and I stayed with four or five students who needed to finish their puppets, and the two high school volunteers went in the hall to work on the backdrop with the other students.

The students cleaned up from working on the backdrops, and then we rehearsed the show. Behind the ten-foot wide stage, the fourteen students were too crowded and could not properly perform with their puppets. A couple of students were talking loudly behind the stage and not focused on what they were doing. (Although the majority of the students were very engaged and trying hard to do their best at performing the show.) After the rehearsal, students took their seats. I asked for feedback on what could be done to improve the performance. Responses included: “make some steam to come out Max’s food” and “be quite back stage.” Students provided feedback to each other instead of only me providing feedback.

***Teacher reflection:***

Today provided an opportunity for significant amounts of student feedback in terms of thinking critically about their art and the end production. The students provided feedback, negotiated differences, and worked hard as a team to prepare for their final performance. Each student is critical to the success of the end production. The students eagerly offered feedback when looking at the artwork that they had created. Taking the time to talk about the work enriched the end product. They worked hard on the backdrop, but I think the high school students may have had a difficult time supervising the work on the backdrop. (Some squabbles did breakout over the glitter glue.) Making the backdrops required the students to work cooperatively and to make negotiations. If I did this again,

I would have had the high school students stay in the room with the few students working on their finishing touches on their puppets, and I would have worked on doing the backdrop with the students.

Students' reflections on their performance skills also demonstrated their investment in a strong end product, yet they are enjoying the creative process as well. What more could a teacher asks for!



Figure 10. Students work cooperatively on backdrop.



Figure 11. Finished backdrop.

### **Teacher's Journal and Reflections – Day Nine:**

**June 17, 2010: Day Nine** – One day left before show time. The students entered the room and found the backdrops hanging up. A few immediately got their puppets and began making up their own dialogue for their own show. This involved one of the wild things having the name *Flower* and another wild thing being called *Max*. I decided the evening prior to divide the students into two groups, so that everyone would not be on stage with their puppets at once. Having fourteen students behind two five foot stages was just too crowded and chaotic. Each student was assigned his or her spot first. I marked the spots with masking tape and wrote the students names on the x's. We rehearsed the show several times. The students performed with their masks to music in front of the stage during the “wild rumpus.” I choreographed a little dance for them to do for the “wild rumpus” that the students performed with their masks in front of the stage.

After rehearsing, the students returned to their seats and we talked about storyboards. We broke the story of Where the Wild Things Are down into six parts on the white board in the front of the room. Next students divided a piece of 11" X 17" inch paper into eight parts. In each square they drew a part one of the main scenes of the story. After working intensely with the story by creating puppets and rehearsing the story, each student could easily recount the story in images. The results demonstrated the students' intimate knowledge of the story.

***Teacher reflection:***

My initial plans for the course did not include students working with storyboards, but as the week progressed it became obvious that I had allotted too much time for rehearsing the show. Rehearsing the show takes about 10-15 minutes, which seems appropriate for this age group. I came up with the storyboard idea the night before teaching, and the results blew me away. Most of the students felt like they did not have time to finish the storyboards. The students could have spent more time working on these. If I repeated this course I would consider using the drawings to create programs for the show and display them during the final performance.



Figure 12. Where the Wild Things Are story board.

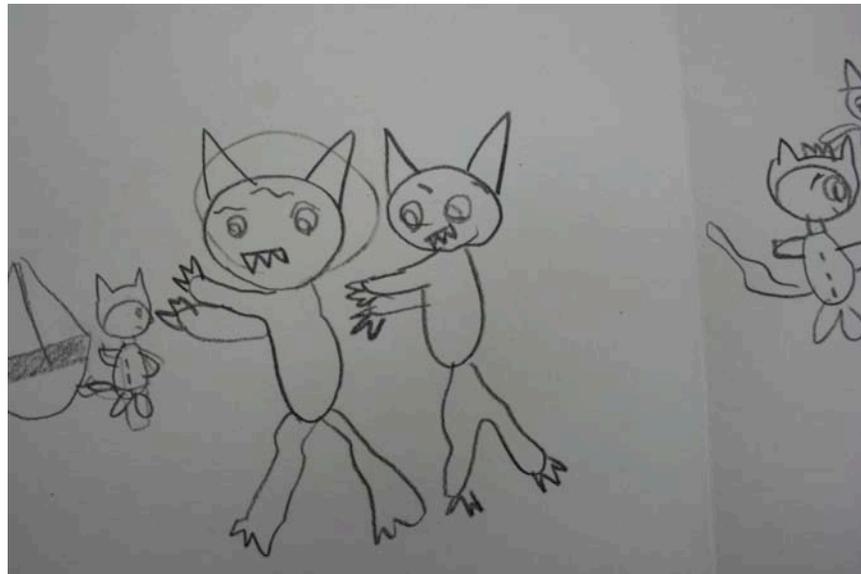


Figure 13. Child drawing - Max meets the "Wild Things"

**Teacher's Journal and Reflections – Day Ten:**

June 18, 2010: Day Ten – The day of the performance finally arrived. Students scurried around the room excitedly setting up chairs and the stage, and creating a sign welcoming parents and supporters to the show. We practiced the show one time. I congratulated them on all of their hard work and reminded them to have fun during this final performance. Some of the students wore special costumes for the performance that they made at home. Over thirty parents, relatives, siblings, and friends attended the performance. We started about five minutes late to make sure all of the parents were in attendance, but one little girl's mom still had not shown up. I decided to start the show. I narrated story and the students acted out the show. The students performed with poise and confidence and with great joy! After the performance parents took photographs of the children, lingered, thanked me for their work with their children and talked with one and another. The little girl whose mom was not there walked around looking very upset. I took down the students' drawings around the room and handed her drawing, a bold-orange tiger, to her. I pulled her aside and told her that I could give her a copy of the video recording of the performance for her family to watch. She nodded her head ok; a mother asked me a question, and I turned to talk to the mother. After I finished talking with her, I turned around to see that the girl had crumpled up her drawing and had burst into sobbing tears that shook her whole little body. Just then the girl's mother rushed into the room. She headed straight to her daughter, fell to her knees, and wrapped her arms tightly around her crying child. The girl buried her head in her mother's chest, and the mother looked up at me with desperation to explain that she had been stranded at the

mechanic while her car was being repaired. She apologized to her daughter, and tried to comfort her by promising to get a copy of the video.

***Teacher reflection:***

The performance meant a lot to the students -- a chance for them to share their success with the people they care most about, their family and friends. For two weeks I guided them in preparing for this performance, and I felt a tremendous amount of pride as their teacher in seeing them successfully perform. The little girl's disappointment in her mother not being there was difficult to witness. I wish I could have done more to make her feel better. I guess that is what teaching is about -- helping students to become fully invested in their work. I learned a lot about myself as a teacher throughout the process.

Key concepts that emerged through teaching the course included:

1. Allow room for students to creative problem solve.
2. Guide students in self-reflection about their artwork.
3. Provide students with an audience to show their artwork. A final performance is an excellent motivator.
4. Unstructured play/exploration of materials leads to creative and imaginative results/work.

## CHAPTER IV

### WHY PUPPETRY?

My thesis research ultimately points to the question of –why puppetry? Why is puppetry my chosen mode of expression as an artist? Why use puppetry in working with children? Leo is also conscientious of why one chooses to tell a story with puppets instead of human actors. She told me, “There should be something that puppets can do that would not be possible to perform in the same way with humans.”<sup>15</sup> Sandy Spieler, also discusses why the artists at *In the Heart of the Beast* chose to work with puppets:

As puppeteers we inherit a powerful ritual legacy rising from the earliest expressions of one’s connection to each other, to life and death itself, to a spirit world. The first puppeteers were shamans and street wanderers. In many ways our work is more closely aligned with this shamanistic theatre. All our pageants and many of our shows are structured according to ritual progression of actions. Our work emphasizes the physical, emotional, and spiritual relationships between the players, and we build our “dialogue” with musical and movement narratives as well as words. Primary characters may be crows, rivers, infants, and cities as well as men and women. Heroines may travel through landscapes of time, battle inner demons, or wrestle societal monsters of great proportions. Clowns often speak at moments of great seriousness. With this poetic form of theatre we express the many layers of waking and dream life that revolve around us each day.<sup>16</sup>

For me being a puppeteer means creating a self-contained world full of low-tech magic and wonder. I experienced this wonder as a child, and I want to give that experience to other young people.

In an article by Judith O’Hare, “Puppets in Education: Process or Product?” She quotes a list generated by Carol Sterling, former educational consultant for Puppeteers of

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<sup>15</sup> Leo, interview with author.

<sup>16</sup> Spieler, 45.

America and director of Arts Partners for the City of New York, citing the educational benefits for working with children with puppetry:<sup>17</sup>

- To develop creative expression
- To stimulate and enhance imagination
- To develop spontaneous oral expression
- To improve speech, enunciation, and voice projection
- To practice writing skills, become more fluent in oral reading
- To gain appreciation of literature
- To develop coordination and sense of timing
- To enhance a child's feeling of self-worth
- To gain self-confidence and personal satisfaction
- To release fears, aggression and frustrations in acceptable ways
- To develop social interaction skills
- To improve fine motor skills

This is a good list of objectives for teaching puppetry, I would also add to the list objectives relevant to the students' visual artistic development. Students gain proficiency in the six content standards for the visual arts developed by the National Art Education Association:

- Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes
- Using knowledge of structures and functions
- Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas

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<sup>17</sup> O'Hare, "Puppets in Education: Process or Product?", in *Puppetry in Education and Therapy*, 66.

- Using the visual arts in relation to history and cultures
- Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others
- Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines

The above lists, objectives, and content standards provide justification for puppetry arts programs and for seeking funding for engaging with this type of work with children. Throughout the collaborative process of producing a puppet performance with the children I worked with I observed students taking **ownership and pride** in their work and also feeling a **sense of accomplishment** in performing. The students were excited to be preparing for their own show that they would be sharing with their family and friends. I also witness a great amount of **team building and cooperation** among the students. Students had to work collectively on making the backdrop and also work together in rehearsing the show. Preparing for the performance required students to **think critically and problem solve**. They brainstormed what they wanted their backdrop to look like, what props they would need, and they were responsible for making their ideas a reality by creating the visual art that would be necessary for the required functions. These are my personal observations as an educator on the benefits of working with puppets with children.

Elliot Eisner argues the arts are critical in shaping the mind and transforming consciousness. He writes:

Work in the arts is not only a way of creating performances and products; it is a way of creating our lives by expanding our consciousness, shaping our dispositions, satisfying our quest for meaning, establishing contact with others, and sharing a culture.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Eisner, 3.

Working with puppetry arts, children imagine new possibilities and then transform those possibilities and ideas into their own public performance. As Eisner argues, making this type of transformation, from the imagined to the real, should be one of education's most important aims.<sup>19</sup>

A scant amount of research exists in regards to puppetry arts in educational settings. More research could be done in the area of assessing puppetry arts programs. It would be interesting to research case studies of students that engage in puppetry work to better understand the significance of these experiences have on their development and to record in the students words the impact these programs have on them.

Thirty-years later after those first experiences in Monica Leo's puppetry workshop, puppetry still fills me with the same sense of wonder and magic that it did when I was a four-year old little girl. I will continue my work, to plant the seeds of puppetry with other people, in hopes that those seeds will flourish in new and exciting ways.

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<sup>19</sup> Eisner, 3.

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