

Helena Korosec*

Evaluating Study of Using Puppets as a Teaching Medium in Slovenian Schools

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Summary: *The article presents the results of the opinion poll conducted among preschool and primary school teachers on the use of puppets in the educational process. Puppets are seen as didactic means for achieving curricular goals. The basis for the implementation of the activity is creative drama, which places the child in the centre of attention. The research was conducted among preschool and primary school teachers in the first and second triade of primary schools. Our goal was to find out how often teachers use puppets in class activity and if they are aware how important the use of puppets is for several aspects: symbolic play, communication, socialization, creativity and curricular goals. Research results show that preschool/primary school teachers have a mainly positive opinion; they believe puppets improve the communication and socialization in a classroom. A child's play with a puppet has a symbolic value because we can recognize the child's feelings and his/her experiencing of the world in it. Teachers are aware of the positive effect of puppet activities on the development of children's imagination and creativity, although they pay less attention to it during the activity. In spite of the positive attitude towards the use of puppets in specific fields, teachers rarely use them in class.*

Keywords: *communication, creativity, curricular goals, puppet play, symbolic play.*

Helena Korošec*

Studija procjene upotrebe lutke kao nastavnog sredstva u slovenskim školama

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Sažetak: *Ovaj članak predstavlja rezultate ankete provedene na odgajateljima u vrtiću i učiteljima u osnovnoj školi o upotrebi lutaka u procesu odgoja i obrazovanja. Lutke se smatraju didaktičkim sredstvima za postizanje ciljeva kurikula. Temelj za primjenu ovih radnja jest kreativna drama, koja postavlja dijete u središte pažnje. Istraživanje je provedeno na odgajateljima u vrtiću i učiteljima u osnovnoj školi u prvoj i drugoj trijadi. Cilj nam je bio otkriti koliko često učitelji upotrebljavaju lutke u razrednim aktivnostima i jesu li svjesni važnosti upotrebe lutke u nekoliko segmenata: simbolička igra, komunikacija, socijalizacija, kreativnost i ciljevi kurikula. Rezultati istraživanja pokazuju da odgajatelji u vrtiću i učitelji u osnovnoj školi imaju uglavnom pozitivno mišljenje: smatraju da lutke poboljšavaju komunikaciju i socijalizaciju u razredu. Djetetova igra lutkom ima simboličku vrijednost jer možemo prepoznati djetetove osjećaje i njegov doživljaj svijeta. Učitelji su svjesni pozitivnog učinka aktivnosti s lutkom na razvoj djetetove mašte i kreativnosti iako tome pridaju manje važnosti za vrijeme aktivnosti. Unatoč pozitivnom stavu prema upotrebi lutaka u određenim područjima, učitelji lutke rijetko upotrebljavaju u razredu.*

Ključne riječi: *komunikacija, kreativnost, ciljevi kurikula, igra lutkom, simbolička igra.*

1. Introduction

Over the past few years, the method of using puppets for achieving curricular goals, which surpasses the traditional approaches in this field, has become more and more established. Yet the current condition is still not satisfying, because the teachers often concentrate only on the puppet show and neglect other aspects of educational work. It is understandable that show-preparations are an extremely important experience during which children learn about the process, the basic characteristics of a drama play and develop a sensibility for the performance. It is important to use an approach which is child-centred and differs from the traditional approach following the model of professional theatres. We proceed from the fact that a puppet is an excellent medium for communication between a teacher and a student, as well as among students. As a mediator in the communication, the

puppet improves interpersonal relations and relaxes the atmosphere in a group. The puppet, as a strong symbolic medium, offers a child the possibility to express emotions, resolve conflicts and a possibility to express his/her own views on the real world in symbolic, so-called “as if” situations. Puppets help teachers to understand children more easily, to identify their feelings and problems and enable a quicker and more interesting achievement of curricular goals.

2. Theoretical part

2.1 Drama in education

During the performance of the puppet-drama activity in preschool or primary school, the principles of *creative drama* (*Creative Drama, Mc Caslin, 2006*) and *drama in education* (*Drama in Education- DIE, Wagner, 1998*) are being considered. This time, we should mention that both cases deal with an approach towards drama activity with children and the young, which rejects tradition based on the transfer of professional theatre work to working with children. Therefore, learning the lines and theatre skills as well as preparing and performing the show are less important or even unimportant. The process, in which the drama activities take place, is of primary importance. When using puppets in class (puppet in the hands of a teacher or a child), it is of extreme importance for the teacher to determine the goals of the puppet project. Planning, practicing and acting are the main goals for professional puppet players but only one of many goals when working with children in the scope of the curriculum. It is important to distinguish between puppet theatre and puppet activities as a form of creative drama, whereas the goal is not the perfect show but the growth and development of a child – puppet player. Whenever the goal is education, the puppet becomes a medium for expressing the child’s understanding of the world, literature, nature, social relations. During the child’s drama creativity, the teacher sees the puppet as a medium for communication and personal interaction. For a child, the greatest motivation is the preparation of the puppet show, during which he/she quickly achieves the goals that were set. At the same time, the preschool or primary school teacher focuses on the process, in which he/she constantly monitors the child and motivates him/her. Somers (2005) writes that “drama is an umbrella term that subsumes its many constituent forms, including theatre and aspects of ritual”. Furthermore, he talks about six main principles that engagement in drama assumes: the modelling of reality through the use of the dramatic medium; our identity can be seen as a personal narrative; by entering the fictional world, we may gain greater understanding of our personal narrative; dramatic experience is not real, so we can release ourselves safely into it; in drama participants must develop cooperation skills; in drama we examine the attitudes, values and relationships of chosen people in selected situations (Somers, 2005).

2.2 Learning with puppets regarding the theory on multiple intelligence

Howard Gardner (1993) has enriched the research field of learning with drama with his famous theory on multiple intelligences. The author deals with the role of the player in a separate chapter “Bodily-Physical Intelligence” (1993, pg. 260), which is strongly connected to other types of intelligences. The participants in drama activities require more types of developed intelligences: *linguistic, bodily-physical, both personal intelligences – interpersonal and intrapersonal*, while *musical intelligence* is also often an indispensable part of the performance (ibid, pg. 242).

Linguistic intelligence is the ability to use words in spoken and written form. Sensitivity for meaning and organization of words, for sounds, rhythm, affixes and for different language functions is important. It is about mastering phonetics, syntax, semantics and pragmatics.

Bodily-physical intelligence is the ability to express oneself through gestures, face mimics or movement. “It is shown in the skilful use of your body, in tool making and in artistic activities such as dancing, acting and pantomime” (Kroflič, 1999). For this type of intelligence it is typical to use one’s body in various skilful ways, for expressing oneself and for other purposes. Gardner (1993) mentions two central elements of physical intelligence – mastering bodily movement and skilful handling of objects. As we can see, both elements are present in a puppet drama play and in a drama play. The animation of the puppet depends on the control over individual body parts; the movement of the puppet is related to the movement of the whole body. Using requisites in playing or in the theatre of objects develops skilful handling of objects. The advantage of drama activity is that the child moves spontaneously, trying to express his/her ideas and emotions.

Besides the necessary conditions, the future artist (child in a drama play) must master personal relations; he/she must get along with other group members so that they can choose a proper role for him/her to be proud of. According to Gardner, at every kind of performance, especially acting, the possibility of attentive monitoring and scene re-creation is very valuable. Some people are born “imitators”, gifted with great potential in the field of bodily intelligence and can remember the most characteristic features of a scene after seeing it for the first time, while others can only vaguely approach the original after seeing it for several times.

Boleslavski (in Gardner, 1993, pg. 261) emphasizes the importance of total concentration, when a person gathers all his/her attention for as long as his/her strength allows it and focuses it on determining the desired subject. Stanislavski (ibid.) also emphasizes the key role of emotions in the performance of an actor.

One of the *personal intelligences* deals with the development of a person’s inner aspects, while the other one deals with the outside – other individuals. The

first one deals with the approach to the personal emotional life – to the range of feelings: the possibility to distinguish between emotions and name them, to transfer them into symbolic code and use them as means for understanding and controlling behaviour. The interpersonal intelligence focuses on the possibility to observe and distinguish between other individuals, especially their feelings, characters, motivations and intentions.

According to Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (1993) and various researches (Bredikyte, 2000, Porenta, 2003, Hamre, 2004, Korošec, 2004), we can certainly say that the drama - puppet activity is a great way to develop children's individual intelligences or talents and skills. Besides learning facts, concepts and legalities, required by the curriculum, creative drama enables the child a holistic learning – with his/her body and mind. The child gets-to-know his/her body and feelings and understands them more easily through puppet play, he/she puts himself/herself in the shoes of others and therefore understands them better, he/she uses motivation to solve problems, he/she remembers things more easily and quickly reaches curricular goals. "Gaining knowledge with the help of a puppet was given a new meaning; children were set into a situation, in which they helped the puppet solve its life problem. They were very engaged and active, as well as inventive, original and creative. The puppet project has shown how performing can be included into teaching as an equal activity in comparison with other – more "academic" activities" (Porenta, 2003).

Surprisingly, puppetry integrates nearly all disciplines important for this development: perception, comprehension, movement, co-ordination, interaction with the environment, speech, narration. It is difficult to explain the fact that puppets usually make better contact with the child than pre-school teachers or even parents. It seems that it is the already mentioned three-levelled stylisation which helps the child to feel, to accept and understand a symbolic situation. Through the simplified situation of metaphorically used objects, it is possible to discover the richness of parabolic games, provoking the child's imagination and creativity as the most important factors in further development.

To create a puppet is an act, supporting child's self-esteem (Majaron, 2011).

2.3 Inclusion of puppets in the school curriculum

Creative puppet activity is a successful method of teaching and learning, suitable for all fields of the curriculum. It is not only a successful method, but also necessary in contemporary education, which not only strives for knowledge but also for creative, relaxed children, full of ideas, wishes and skills for problem solving. D. Fontana (1996/97, in Kroflič, 1999) describes artistic creativity as an inevitable element of a holistic "education for being" in contrast to the "education for knowing". Without creativity, education is impoverished of experiencing

the inner world and is reduced to a mere objective science. It is important that artistic and basic subject fields are connected and supplement each other. Artistic activities are not the privilege of the talented and academically successful children anymore, but an advantage and help for everyone.

The use of puppets (including visual expression and music) can result in a considerable contribution to a more humane and less stressful educational system in the first years of a child's integration into a group. Moreover, puppets arouse imagination and creativity. This is one of the simplest and most effective ways to develop support to the child's curiosity about environment. And when it's filled with the arts – children will accept this same method of communication, to respond through the language of the arts (Majaron, 2011).

Carol Sterling, former advisor for puppets in education to the Puppeteers of America argues that puppets offer children the conditions for achieving the following educational goals (in O'Hare, 2004):

- stimulate creative expression,
- stimulate and increase imagination,
- develop spontaneous verbal expression,
- improve language and pronunciation,
- practice writing and fluent reading skills,
- acquire the feeling for evaluation of literature,
- stimulate mutual cooperation and develop orientation in time and place,
- stimulate the child's self-value,
- acquire self-esteem and personal content,
- release fears, aggression and frustrations in an acceptable way,
- develop social-interactive skills.

J. O'Hare also added the following goals: master problem-solving skills, improve fine motor skills, improve listening skills, learn to accept and to give ideas, observe the world with all senses, remembering the observed, processing it and reviving it, through puppets, asses work. Working with puppets enables students to reach all the above mentioned goals, which are part of the contemporary curriculum. Children cooperate in the process and are approaching their goal step by step: they create their own puppet, form the story and the script, discuss and decide how and when a character will perform, solve problems and prepare the scene or the show. The success of the whole process is the final scene, which is prepared by groups of children. This, however, is not assessed by the aesthetic looks of the puppet or by the performance in the show. Preschool and primary school teachers focus on other achievements: how did children cooperate, how did they communicate, how was the theme problem solved, how did they manage

to reach a consensus in the group, what was the emotional response of individuals like, how were individuals included into work – especially socially excluded children, how was the puppet story formed, did everyone cooperate (what is the dependence on individual skills), did every child's puppet become alive?

The process is more important than the product and the scene. The child's development is put in the first place. Therefore, younger students will not be burdened with learning the text by heart. Their performance should be improvised, made-up or adjusted after a literary work. The artistic value increases with age, developmental stage and with the child's experiences. Puppet activities are not only suitable for younger children. Creating their own puppets and performing in front of parents or younger children represents a challenge for older children. "The preparations for a performance in classroom have a positive effect on every participant and on the whole group. Finding their place among their classmates is an important element for all students and helps them build a positive self-esteem; being aware of themselves and their skills, which differ from the skills of others, is one of the most precious results which comes spontaneously during the puppet activity" (Majaron, 2003).

2.4 Communicating with puppets

When talking about a theatre with actors, we are talking about a direct but impersonal communication between the actor and the audience. In the puppet theatre, the actor communicates with the audience over a medium – a puppet. The actor must give up his/her ego and focus all his/her energy into the puppet. While the actor in a theatre play receives an approval for his/her ego, the actor in the puppet performance puts the puppet in the first place. If we transfer this way of communication into school, we can see that the direct communication in the theatre performance with the exposure of the ego suits egocentric children, who wish to emphasize their ego. A shy child will only dare to communicate with the puppet, which represents a "shield" – alter ego – through which the child can communicate. An egocentric child will have to subordinate his/her ego to the puppet, if he/she wishes to establish a relation with others through the puppet.

When dealing with children with learning or speaking difficulties or with children who are shy in communication, the teachers often feel helpless. They often wonder how to find the right approach, the right way for the child to relax, open up and establish communication with the teacher and other children. The puppet in the hands of a preschool/primary school teacher or in the hands of a child creates conditions for a successful communication, which preserves the child's dignity. Effective communication is represented by continuous creating and reviving of interpersonal values: cooperation, the feeling of personal security, self-respect and respect for others. The analysis of the qualitative research records

(Korošec, 2004) shows that puppets enable and stimulate all the above-mentioned aspects of communication and thereby enable less successful and shy children to participate in communication. For a shy child, the puppet represents protection from direct exposure and often enables a more spontaneous inclusion of the child into the activities. Children relax when playing with puppets. Teachers have noticed that children change in this kind of communication. It is surprising that children with difficulties, who are pushed on the verge of communication, are the most active children when playing with puppets. According to the experiences of teachers, puppets help children overcome the fear from asking questions. The child focuses all his/her attention on the puppet and is not aware that he/she is answering the questions related to subject matter.

2.5 Symbolic play with puppets

There is no object in every-day life that could not be revived or given a new symbolic meaning. Each stone, wooden spoon or piece of paper can become alive by looking at it and by moving it. A child can give a new meaning to every object. In this way the child expresses a part of his/her intimate, empiric or subconscious world. Starting from the theory of symbolic play (Duran, 2001), which can be linked to a puppet play (ibid.), we can say that the puppet is an extremely rich motivation medium for enriching and sensitizing the child's emotional and social potential, because it forces the child to put himself/herself in the puppet's situation and its way of thinking. This offers the child a possibility to understand things from different angles, which is a prerequisite for tolerance, innovation, emotional intelligence and the capability of empathy.

Through drama or fantasy plays with puppets, children gradually understand what is real in their world and what is not. By testing their own abilities and borders in the environment, they use the puppet performance to express what they have seen, heard or experienced emotionally. Puppets are extremely appropriate for the child's nonverbal and verbal expression of inner conflicts related to the reality. A child can use puppets to create a situation he/she wishes to experience but knows that it is impossible in the real world.

Observing things from different angles and away from reality help children understand real principles. Supporters of reality and of "serious" work in school believe that it might be dangerous for the children because they would start mixing up fantasy and real world. The question is whether children could get a wrong image about the bear's winter sleep, if we allow the child to dress the bear in the puppet play into a pyjama and put it in a house to sleep. According to the theory of the symbolic play, children can precisely distinguish between fantasy and real situations. Therefore, the fear of mixing reality with imagination is groundless. "Such games develop the child's inner life on the fantasy level, without hindering

the progress in controlling reality. Therefore, the fear of adults that the child will remain in the world of imagination is exaggerated. What is more, the child uses the fantasy play to recognise the hurdles, which have been set by the reality. /.../ Fantasy play helps the child to arrange the mess in his/her inner world and to establish the control of reality. Fantasy (inner) world and external reality are no longer alternatives. In contrary – imagination represents a bridge between the unconscious and the external reality. In this way, the face of the reality also becomes softer and more human. It no longer represents painful demands and restrictions” (Praper, 1992, pg.179).

Very interesting examples of using applied puppetry in different contexts are provided by M. Smith (2012, pg. 83). In the context of a secure unit, children who were detained for their own safety and the safety of the public participate in a puppet workshop. In this secure unit they make and perform with toy theatres. They choose music and images from magazines, later the toy theatres, are filmed as live animations. The general positive result of this workshop was that these children learned to play again. The puppetry gave the groups and individuals the opportunity and freedom to explore play, something they found hard to do because of their traumatic lives.

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

“Put the puppets in the hands of the people as a part of a radical pedagogy based on participation influenced by the ideas of Paulo Friere and Augusto Boal. The puppet can be used as an emancipatory tool for groups to describe their world views together and celebrate their humanity. The location for this practice is the workshop as a democratic laboratory for collectively conceiving of a new cultural landscape” (Smith, 2012, pg. 84).

A puppet can do everything a person cannot. A puppet can fly, fight in a battle, defeat bad witches, it is stronger than the greatest giant and can chase away even the biggest fears, which appear at night. A tiny puppet from fabric or paper owns this incredible power.

This chapter dealt with the theoretic basis and the influence of the puppet on the learning process and on the child’s development. More will be discussed at another occasion. This time, we will only represent a research conducted among preschool and primary school teachers. The goal was to find out how much teachers are aware of the creative puppet activity principles and how much they are aware of the puppet’s influence on different aspects of educational work in class.

3. Empirical part

3.1 Problem

The research problem deals with the attitude of preschool and primary school teachers towards the use of puppets in the educational process. The goal of the research was to find out if the teachers are aware how important the puppets are for several aspects: symbolic play, communication, socialization, creativity and achievement of curricular goals. We were curious if there are any differences in teachers' opinion according to their age, working position and the frequent use of a puppet.

3.2 Research goals

The research dealt with:

- the frequency of using puppets in the educational process;
- preschool and primary school teachers' point of view on using puppets as a method of teaching, focusing on the effects in five fields (communication, socialization, creativity, symbolic play, curricular goals) with statistical control of age, working position and the frequency of using puppets.

3.3 Research method

The empirical research is based on the *descriptive* and *causal none-experimental* method of educational research.

3.4 Description of the sample

The population included in the research included preschool and primary school teachers, who teach in first and second triade of Slovenian primary schools. The random sample included 249 interviewees (none of them were male). The sample included 27 preschool teachers, working in the 1st grade of the 9-year primary school programme, 57 primary school teachers from the first triade of the primary school programme and 140 teachers from the second triade primary school programme. 25 interviewees did not answer the question about their working position. The number of answers varies from one statement to the other because some interviewees did not answer some questions.

* A team of two teachers teaches in first grade of Slovenian primary schools: Preschool teacher and Primary school teacher. Only Primary school teacher teaches in second and third grade of first triade.

Table 1 – *Sample structure according to working position*

Working position*	N	cumulative N	%
Preschool teacher	27	27	10.8
First triade	57	84	22.9
Second triade	140	224	56.2
No answer	25	249	10.1

Most of the interviewees have a university degree (48.8%), many (32.4%) have finished the 2-year higher vocational programme, 5.7 % have finished the 3-year vocational programme, and 4.1% of them have finished high school.

The age of the interviewees varies from 22 to 52 years, while the majority (56.6 F%) is younger than 35. The span of the working life moves from 0 years (students in 4th year of Teacher Education) to 31 years. The majority is represented by preschool and primary school teachers with a working life up to 10 years (56.4 % F). That means that the research included younger preschool and primary school teachers with a shorter working life.

Table 2 – *Sample structure according to age*

Age	N	Cumulative N	%
22-31 years	109	109	43.8
32 - 41	89	198	35.7
41 – 52	44	242	17.7
No answer	7	249	2.8

Table 3 – *Sample structure according to the frequency of using puppets*

The frequency of using puppets	N	Cumulative N	%
Never	7	7	2.8
3 times per year	51	58	20.5
Once per month	58	116	23.3
Every week	55	171	22.1
Every day	22	193	8.8
No answer	56	249	22.5

According to the frequency of using puppets in class, five groups were formed: interviewees who never use puppets, those who use them three times per year, once per month, every week and every day.

3.5 The process of data collection and data processing

The attitudes of the interviewees towards the use of puppets in class were analyzed with the opinion scale for preschool and primary school teachers, formed by senior lecturer Helena Korošec. The instrument included 26 statements, which referred to five aspects of using puppets in class. In two statements, the interviewees decided on the quality of achieving goals with the help of puppets and on the frequency of using puppets for the achievement of curricular goals. *The statements were grouped into five groups according to their content: communication, socialization, creativity, symbolic play and goals.* The interviewees had to express their opinion about the statements on the basis of the five-level Likert scale.

The research was based on the previous pilot research, conducted among preschool and primary school teachers from different regions in Slovenia as well as among students of Teacher Education at the Faculty of Education at the University of Ljubljana. The pilot sample was used to check the measurement characteristics of the opinion scale. The opinion scale was forwarded to different addresses of primary schools all over Slovenia. Thereby it was secured that the sample included preschool and primary school teachers from different primary schools in different regions of Slovenia. We established cooperation with the leaders of study groups in schools and informed them on the purpose of the research. Before filling out the opinion scale, the interviewees were informed about all the details and even offered the possibility of extra explanation.

Research data were analysed with the SPSS computer programme for statistical analysis. The criteria for the statistical significance was the level of risk $2P$ or $P = 0.05$.

4. Results and interpretation

4.1 Independent variables

Age: The interviewees were grouped in three different groups according to their age (ten years each): 22 – 31 years, 32 – 41 years and the last group from 41 to 52 years (Table 2).

Working position: When determining different opinions according to the working position, only employed interviewees were considered. We were examining differences between primary school teachers of the second triade primary school programme (56.23%), primary school teachers of the first triade

primary school programme (22.89) and preschool teachers (10.84%) who work in the 1st grade of the 9-year primary school programme (Table 1).

The frequency of using puppets: Different attitudes according to the frequent use of puppets were researched in five groups. Seven interviewees (2.81%) have never used puppets in class, 51 interviewees (20.48%) use puppets 3 times per year, 58 interviewed teachers (23.29%) use puppets once per month, while 55 of them (22.09%) use them once per week and 22 (8.84%) almost every day. It is important to point out that 22.49% of the interviewed teachers did not answer this question. We presume that they felt uncomfortable and embarrassed by this question. We can suppose that in case of using puppets in class they would have answered this question (Table 3).

4.2 Dependent variables

Dependent variables represent individual statements and groups of statements concerning the opinion of preschool and primary school teachers about certain aspects of working with puppets:

- communication,
- symbolic play,
- socialization,
- creativity,
- achievement of curricular goals.

4.3 Analysis of the role of age, working position and the frequency of using puppets

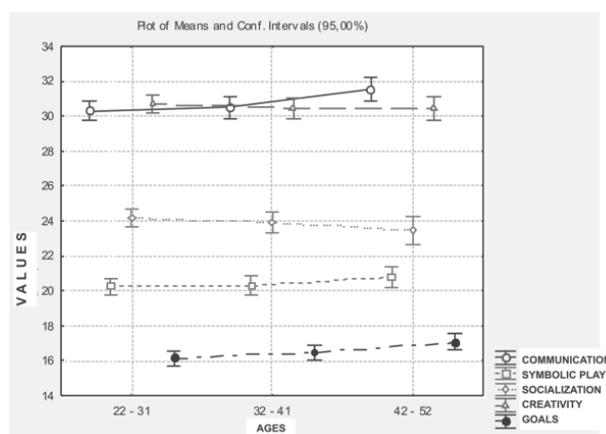
4.3.1 The role of age

We are introducing an analysis of the role of age for individual fields. The following results were gathered by the variance analysis test.

Table 6 – *Variance analysis for different fields according to age*

Field of opinion	F	p
Communication	3.226	0.042
Socialization	0.839	0.434
Creativity	1.009	0.366
Symbolic play	0.299	0.742
Goals	3.166	0.044

We found out that age had little influence on the attitudes of the interviewees. However, statistically important differences among groups were noticed in the fields of *communication* and *goals*.



Graph 1 – Differences in attitude according to age

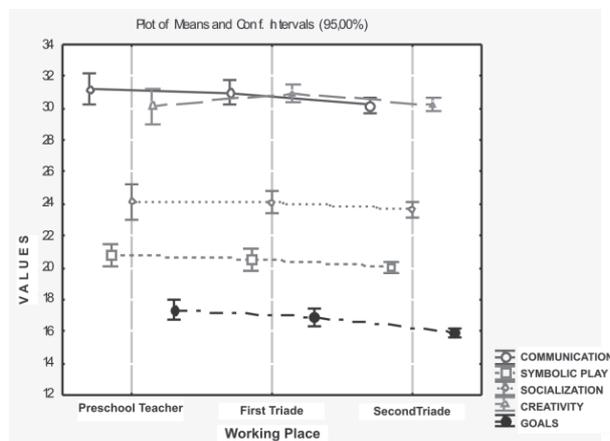
Graph 1 shows that older interviewees have a more positive attitude towards both fields, in which the statistically relevant difference between groups has appeared. The results show that older interviewees are more aware of the puppet's communication value in class and of its role for achieving curricular goals. However, younger interviewees have a more positive attitude in the field of *creativity*, although the differences are not statistically relevant.

4.3.2 The role of the working position

We wondered if the working position of the interviewees affects their opinion on the use of puppets in class. The analysis included three groups: preschool teachers, primary school teachers of the first triade and primary school teachers of the second triade programme.

Table 7 – Variance analysis for different fields according to the working position

Field of opinion	F	p
Communication	2.63	0.0746
Socialization	1.81	0.165
Creativity	0.61	0.544
Symbolic play	1.69	0.186
Goals	9.17	0.000



Graph 2 – *Opinion differences according to working position*

The working position of interviewees has a minor impact on their attitudes and opinions. The variance analysis results show that a statistically relevant difference in attitude among individual groups (preschool teacher, primary school teacher first triade programme, primary school teacher second triade programme) only appears in the field of *goals*. There is also a tendency that preschool teachers have a more positive attitude than all primary school teachers in the fields of *communication*, *socialization* and *creativity*, while primary school teachers of the first triade primary school programme have a more positive attitude in the field of *symbolic play*. However, these differences are not statistically relevant.

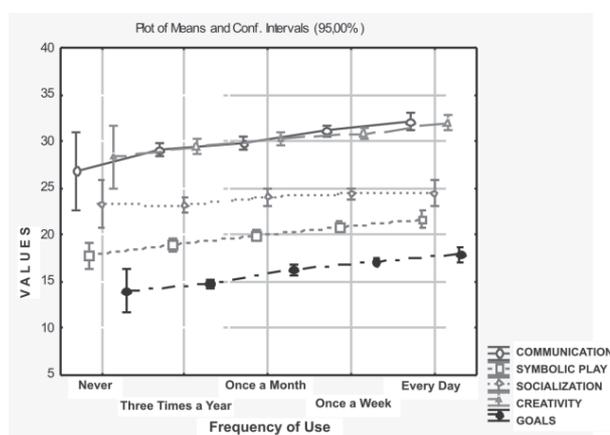
Preschool teachers have the most positive attitude (Graph 2), followed by teachers from the first triade primary school programme and teachers from the second triade programme. We presume that preschool teachers believe that puppets are a successful instrument for the achievement of curricular goals. The opinion is that curricular goals can be efficiently reached by the puppet method, which effects the child's emotional and social development at the same time. The interviewees believe that this method helps them reach their goals faster and more efficiently and that working with puppets does not require too much time and effort.

4.3.3 *The role of frequent use*

We were wondering whether there are differences in attitude according to the frequency of using puppets in class. We used the variance analysis method to search for differences among the five groups.

Table 8 – Variance analysis for the fields of opinion according to the frequency of use

	F	p
Communication	10.31	0.000
Socialization	9.29	0.000
Creativity	1.64	0.166
Symbolic play	5.61	0.000
Goals	19.28	0.000

**Graph 3** – Differences in attitude according to the frequency of use

The table above shows that the difference in average attitude among groups is statistically relevant in four fields. We noticed a difference in the fields of *communication*, *socialization*, *symbolic play* and *goals*, while there were no statistically relevant differences in the field of *creativity*. Graph 3 shows that those interviewees who use puppets frequently – every day, have the most positive attitude in all fields. The positive attitude falls with the falling frequency of using puppets in class.

The greatest difference among the groups is shown in the attitude towards the puppet's influence on achieving curricular goals ($F = 19.28$). The interviewees who often use puppets (every day, once per week, once per month) believe that a puppet is an effective learning instrument, pleasant for achieving curricular goals and that it effects the social and emotional development of a child. Their attitude towards the quality of goals achieved with the puppet's help is more positive than the attitude of the other two groups (never, three times per year). Among the preschool and primary school teachers, the stereotypes about the realization

of puppet-drama activities are probably deeply rooted. In different seminars and lectures, we often come across the opinion that the realization of such activities requires a lot of time, which is impossible because of the busy schedule. They are mentally and emotionally in favour of puppets, which seem magical and fascinating. However, they think that puppets are a spare-time activity. Since only a few teachers have the opportunity to gain knowledge in the didactic approach with puppets, they also cannot be informed about basic working methods, which consider curricular goals and are child-centred. This knowledge helps them realise that puppet activities are not too time-consuming but contribute to a better and quicker achievement of goals. Those interviewees who often use puppets share such a positive point of view. With the gained knowledge, they are also more self-confident, while positive experiences stimulate them to repeat such lessons (Korošec, 2004). We believe that the presumption that puppets take too much time and effort is the reason why puppets are not used more often. According to our expectations, the differences in attitude are even larger between groups that use puppets and those who do not.

The results show statistically relevant differences in the attitude towards the influence of puppets on communication in class ($F = 10.31$). The communication with puppets in class is analysed from three different aspects: a child with a puppet in his/her hands represents the first aspect, the preschool or primary school teacher represents the second, while the general atmosphere in class is the third aspect. Preschool and primary school teachers are aware of the nonverbal aspect of communication with a puppet, which is of extreme importance for an equal inclusion of a shy child into work. The medium enables the child to express himself/herself with more ease. Even children with low verbal expression skills have the opportunity to be included in communication – especially with nonverbal signs. Such communication, which according to the principles of creative puppet activity also considers the child's imagination, will later stimulate the child to verbalization. Even theoretic findings of different authors (Argyle, in Rot 1982, Brajša, 1993, Barker, 1997) prove that we can often express ourselves more clearly with nonverbal signs than verbal and that nonverbal expression is a more powerful means of expression. The positive attitude of the interviewees shows that puppet activities create a more pleasant atmosphere in class and relax the children. The analysis showed large differences in attitudes between both groups. We believe that the statistically relevant differences occur because of different experiences. Preschool or primary school teachers, who often use puppets, have learned from experience that puppets improve the interpersonal communication. During the creative puppet activity, the communication takes place in more groups and in more directions at the same time. Teachers notice the pleasant atmosphere in class, while puppets help them establish contact with children. Those teachers

who rarely use puppets in class have made less experience concerning the puppet's influence on communication and therefore have a less positive attitude. The positive effects of puppets on communication and on the achievement of curricular goals have also been determined by M. Bredikyte (2000), I. Hamre (2004, 2011), H. Ivon (2010).

The mean value of the opinion about the influence of the puppet on socialization shows that all five groups are aware of the puppet's important influence on socialization in class. However, those groups who frequently use puppets (every day, once per week, once per month) have a more positive opinion ($F = 9.29$). Group games – the basis for creative puppet activity – teach the children to solve minor conflicts (Debouny, 2002) while the activity triggers the integration of shy children and children with learning and behavioural difficulties. The creating of the puppet and playing with it makes children more self-confident and their success makes them appreciated and accepted by their schoolmates. The more positive attitudes are also a consequence of frequent use and experiences. The teachers' experiences prove (2004, 2012) that the method of working with puppets is successful for the inclusion of socially excluded children into the group. A puppet can overcome many frustrations because of the transfer from preschool to primary school and because of the parents' divorce. The child gets attached to the puppet, which waits for him/her in the hands of the teacher and spends the whole day with him/her and with the activities. Sometimes, the puppet accompanies the child home; thereby, a piece of school is transferred into home environment and later the piece of home with the puppet's experiences is transferred back to school.

A. Porenta's (2003) qualitative research about the puppet's influence on the child's emotional, social and intellectual development states that children have undergone a positive experience in the acceptance of different people and the development of friendly relations. The puppet has helped them gain friends and overcome the fear from situations which are unfamiliar for children. Therefore, the puppet was an important part of the child's socialization.

The interviewees even had a positive attitude for the use of puppets in the field of symbolic play, although the variance analysis has shown that there are statistically relevant differences between the groups that use puppets frequently and rarely ($F = 5.61$). On the basis of the results we can presume that preschool and primary school teachers with more experience are more aware of the importance of symbolic play for children than the group of teachers who rarely use puppets in class.

A puppet can take a child beyond reality into a fantasy world, where he/she can solve conflicts and frustrations of the real world on a symbolic level (Praper, 1992). With the help of various puppet heroes, the child will project his/

her own positive and negative emotions in the scene, which will reveal more to the teacher – a good observer – than a direct conversation in class ever could. During fantasy play, children sort the mess in their inner world and recognize the boundaries of the external world. By accustoming to different roles, the child learns to understand things from different sight angles and to understand the emotions of others (Duran, 1988, 2001). Therefore, it is important that the teacher is familiar with the aspects of the symbolic puppet play, which help him/her understand the child. The more teachers are aware of the influence the puppet play has on the child's social and emotional development, the more they will enable it for all children, regardless of their skills. With the teacher's professional knowledge, the activities will be organised in a way which will enable children to achieve curricular goals and develop imagination at the same time. What is more, children will also include feelings, wishes, conflicts, views on the world and their experiences with views on them.

In the opinion field of *creativity* there were no statistically relevant differences between the groups, not even in one dependent variable (age, working position, frequency of use). We have noticed, however, that the mean value results concerning the attitude towards the aspect of creativity were among the lowest. The rather negative attitude was noticed in the statement "Subject matter is more important for the children than creativity." School is rather productivity oriented and focuses mainly on the learning of subject matter, reaching results and thinking within a certain framework. The development of imagination and creativity is not only important for the present, but also for the future. Children who solve their problems with creativity, create with imagination and link fantasy and reality in stories and creative products will also be creative later in their life, in the era of information sciences, when nobody will ask them about the mass of information but how to develop and use them in the most creative way. It is important that preschool and primary school teachers, who can offer children different situations in time and place, where children can test their curiosity and creativity, are aware of that. According to the principles of creative drama, the child should have the opportunity to create a puppet in accordance to his/her skills. By doing the opposite and demanding a "completed" puppet, we are hindering the child's creativity and his/her development of imagination. The important question that influences the (non)creative process is whether the teacher will prepare models for the creating of puppets or whether he/she will allow children their creative freedom. The development of children's creative expression during puppet activities was also discussed by M. Bredikyte (2000) in her research, where children in an experimental group (in which learning was based on playing with puppets) have chosen more creative activities and were more original in nonverbal and verbal expression.

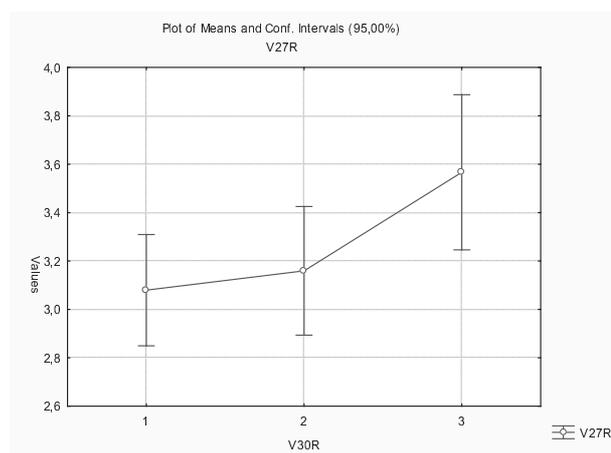
4.4 The analysis of the frequent use of puppets according to age and working position

We were curious whether there are differences in the frequent use of puppets in relation to the statistical control of age and working position. The variance analysis was used to compare three (10-year) age groups and three groups according to the working position.

4.4.1 The role of age with the frequency of using puppets

Table 9 – Variance analysis for the frequency of using puppets according to age

Frequent use	F	p
V27	2.396	0.093

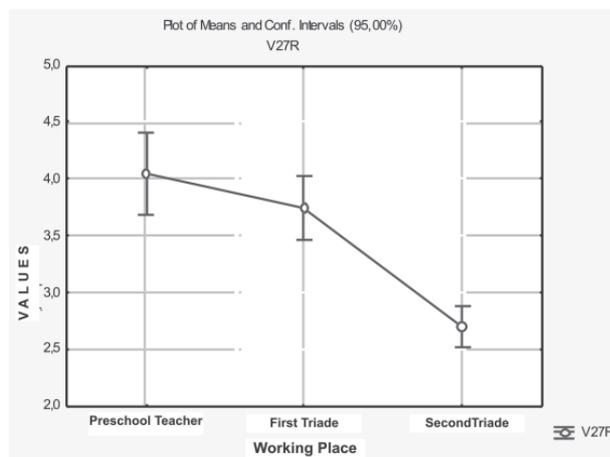


Graph 4 – The frequency of using puppets according to age

According to the variance analysis results, there are no statistically relevant differences in the frequency of using puppets, considering the age of the interviewees. We noticed that older interviewees use puppets more frequently than younger interviewees. However, the differences between different groups are not larger than the differences within individual groups. Therefore, we cannot speak about the influence of age on the frequent use of puppets as a didactic means.

4.4.2 *The role of the working position for the frequency of using puppets***Table 10** – *Variance analysis for the frequency of using puppets according to the working position*

The frequency of using puppets	F	p
V27	31.606	0.000

**Graph 5** – *The frequency of using puppets according to the working position*

The variance analysis showed statistically relevant differences in the frequency of using puppets according to the working position ($F = 31,606$). There are significant differences between individual groups. Graph 5 shows that preschool teachers use puppets more frequently than primary school teachers from the first triade school programme, while primary school teachers from the second triade programme use them even rarely. We believe that the reasons are the improved curriculum and education. The new curriculum for the first triade already foresees more puppet and drama activities. The education for preschool teachers already includes the basics of puppetry, while primary school teachers for the first triade of primary school have taken Module 8 – The puppet, a co-worker in the first period of primary school – at the Faculty of Education in Ljubljana. The process and goal planning and the increasing of the child's active role in the learning process also requires the preschool/primary school teacher to include the methods of teaching and learning with art and through art. However, we should remember that all results are based on the attitude of interviewees and that a research, which would include monitoring, should be conducted in order to test the results.

4.5 The role of independent variables

Table 11 – *Two-way variance analysis of the independent variables' influence on the opinion*

Independent variables	Test	Value	F	Effect	Fault estimation	p
Frequency of using puppets	Wilks' lambda	0,700029	2,792	20	491,8103	0,000061
Age	Wilks' lambda	0,929421	1,103	10	296,0000	0,359227
Working position	Wilks' lambda	0,950017	0,769	10	296,0000	0,659022

The two-way variance analysis was used to determine which of the independent variables has the most significant influence on the opinion of the interviewees. The analysis included all three independent variables and all depended variables joint in groups. The results have shown that the frequency of using puppets has the most significant influence on the opinion of preschool/primary school teachers, and not their working position or their age. We noticed that all three independent variables were interacting, although the frequency of use has made the greatest influence on the opinion of the interviewees. Therefore, the opinion about the use of puppets has more to do with actions than with age and working position.

5. Conclusion

Preschool and primary school teachers have a predominantly positive attitude towards the use of puppets in class situations. At the same time, they are in a dilemma, wondering when a method of working with puppets is good and useful and why. In spite of the positive attitude towards the influence of puppets on different aspects of work and child development, we discovered that puppets are rarely used in class. We did not find any explanation on this matter; however, the reasons could be hidden in the statement that puppets take too much time and effort. Consequently, the methods of traditional drama, which transfer the professional way of working from the theatre to working with children, are difficult to change and hinder the introduction of new methods. This opens up the question of separating the opinion and attitude from practical actions. We have noticed frequent dilemmas in the fields of creativity and symbolic play. On principle, creativity, imagination and symbolic play with the method of working with puppets are seen as quality and are an advantage for the preschool/primary school teacher. At the same time, some indicators warn about different attitudes or a less creative approach in the

realisation of puppet activities, which does not consider the child's ideas and where the activity is realised according to the teacher's ideas. The knowledge about the symbolic value of puppet activities will have to be improved. The education should focus on the puppet's function for resolving inner conflicts, for understanding things from different sight angles and for connecting fantasy world and external reality during relaxed, improvised puppet scenes, which can be connected to the curriculum. This can ease stressful situations of children when entering primary school, increase the motivation in the learning process and accelerate learning. Preschool/primary school teachers often wonder how to use puppets and how to connect them with the curriculum. According to our research, the percentage of those who use puppets every day, once per week or once per month is smaller. The results have shown that the working position has a slight influence on the frequency of use and that statistically relevant differences were noticed. Preschool teachers use puppets as a didactic means significantly more often than teachers from the first triade primary school programme, while primary school teachers from the second triade programme use them even rarely. It was interesting to discover that the frequency of using puppets is the independent variable, which affects the attitude the most. Hence it follows that we must influence the actions of preschool/primary school teachers in order for them to use the puppet in the learning process more frequently and to use it in a professionally adequate way.

Some other researches, mentioned in the article, have shown positive effects of the puppet method on children's emotional, social and intellectual development. The findings of our research show that preschool/primary school teachers have a positive attitude towards creative puppetry as a method of working with children. We should add the basic professional knowledge and stimulation for creativity and research. Therefore, the assignment of the puppet and drama education didactics (methodology) is to provide basic professional knowledge for a large number of undergraduate students of Teacher Education and Preschool Education and to offer continuous vocational training for preschool and primary school teachers with the creative puppet activity approach, which is child-centred. This means that a great leap in thinking will be necessary in order to surpass the stereotypical role of puppets in preschools and primary schools. Puppets should not only be perfectly completed products, which perform in a well-prepared show with emotionally stable as well as intellectually and verbally successful students. Puppets should help teachers in teaching and in better understanding of children, their emotions and reactions.

The realized empirical research helped us gather different findings and guidelines, necessary for the approval of a regular and symbolic puppet performance and for the improvement of communication between preschool/primary school teachers and students as well as among students.

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*Helena Korošec

Lo studio di valutazione dell'uso di pupazzi come strumento nell'insegnamento nelle scuole slovene

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Riassunto: *L'articolo presenta i risultati del sondaggio effettuato tra gli insegnanti in strutture prescolari e scolari (scuola primaria) e incentrato sull'uso dei pupazzi nel processo d'insegnamento. I pupazzi sono visti come degli strumenti didattici nel raggiungimento degli obiettivi previsti dai programmi. La base per la messa in opera di simili attività è la creatività legata alla dimensione teatrale che pone il bambino al centro dell'attenzione. La ricerca è stata effettuata tra gli insegnanti presso strutture per bimbi in età prescolare e scolare (scuola primaria) nella prima e nella seconda triade delle scuole primarie. Il nostro obiettivo è stato quello di scoprire quanto spesso gli insegnanti impieghino i pupazzi nelle attività in classe e se siano consapevoli quanto il loro impiego sia importante per diverse ragioni: il gioco simbolico, socializzazione, creatività e gli obiettivi previsti dal piano di studi. I risultati della ricerca dimostrano come gli insegnanti nelle strutture prese in esame hanno prevalentemente un'opinione positiva riguardo all'uso di simili strumenti; credono che i pupazzi migliorino la comunicazione e la socializzazione in classe. Il gioco del bambino col pupazzo ha un valore simbolico per che vi si possono riconoscere i sentimenti del bimbo e i riflessi del rapporto col mondo esterno. Gli insegnanti sono consapevoli dell'effetto positivo delle attività legate ai pupazzi sullo sviluppo della creatività e dell'immaginazione del bambino anche se prestano meno attenzione a tutto questo durante lo svolgimento delle attività. Nonostante l'atteggiamento positivo verso l'uso dei pupazzi nei determinati campi, gli insegnanti li usano raramente in classe.*

Parole chiave: *comunicazione, creatività, obiettivi fissati dal piano di studi, gioco teatrale con i pupazzi, il gioco simbolico.*

*Mr. Helena Korošec
Maribor, Slovenia

*Mr. Helena Korošec
Maribor, Slovenia

*Mr. Helena Korošec
Maribor, Slovenia