



THE PUPPET PROJECT

Warren Early Childhood Center, 2008

CLASS AND PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Warren Early Childhood Center provides services for 340 children in kindergarten, preschool, developmental preschool and developmental kindergarten. The school is inspired by the practices and philosophies of Project Approach and Reggio Emilia. The walls are covered with children's conversations, photographs, documentation, and child-created work. The classroom environment is designed to create a warm atmosphere that encourages learning and creativity.

The children in my classes attend school three hours a day, five days a week. There are 10 children in the morning (5 boys, 5 girls) and nine in the afternoon (8 boys, 1 girl). Their disabilities range from developmental delay to communication disorder to moderate mental handicap to multiple disabilities. In addition to direct instruction, the children receive speech, occupational and physical therapies.

Although 2007-2008 was my first year at the Warren Early Childhood Center, I quickly embraced the practice of project work. When the school year began, many of my children lacked the language

skills many would consider necessary for a project. However, I listened and observed, and many projects developed from the children's interests – from shadow play to pizza to automobile repair to stained glass to puppets. As we have traveled through this year, the level of language and leadership from the children has greatly increased, as has their investigations of topics.

Warren Early
Childhood
Center...Helping
Children Climb Their
Own Mountains!

Protagonists

Nyla, 5	Lyndsey, 3
Jazzy, 4	Jordan, 5
Bailey, 4	Danny, 3
Jaida, 3	Nick, 3
Ayana, 5	Ethan, 4
Marty, 3	Jalen, 4
Mi'Kwon, 3	Ashton, 3
Ethan, 3	Caege, 3
Angelo, 4	Carlos, 4
Joel, 3	

Teachers

Mrs. Kelli Servizzi
Mrs. Sue McGovern
Mrs. Leti Vasquez
Mrs. Lisa Wildrick



EMERGING PROJECT



The Puppet Project began with a small tub filled with store-bought puppets. The initial puppets were purchased at dollar stores and were hand puppets or character bath mitts. The puppets were available during free choice time; and while most of the children chose to play with the puppets, their interactions were primarily one-on-one with very

little conversation, and the puppets acted aggressively toward one another.

I allowed this type of play for a couple of days as I waited for a child to lead the project. I sat down with a group on February 11, 2008 and used a different voice to make the puppet talk to the children. As I asked questions, all of the boys and girls made their puppets respond and soon we were giving them names.

At this point, Nick, 3, took a leadership role. He brought over a cake and cookies from a dollhouse and planned a party.

Nick (with a duck puppet): "I'm having a party."
Ethan, 3 (with a lion puppet): "I

wanna come."

Nick: "You bring the cake."

Nick to Carlos: "You bring chips."

Carlos, 3 (with a tiger puppet): "Don't have chips."

Nick: "You have to go to the store."

Ethan: "I bring water too."

Boys: "Mmmm, yum."





Jazzy, 4: "What is it?"
Marty, 3: "For puppets!"



I noticed the puppets appeared to have a storyline, but they did not have a setting. On February 15, I brought a small stage into the classroom. Like the puppets, I did not tell the children what it was or what they should do with it. Rather, I placed it at the front of the room and left it to them to investigate.

While Jazzy and Marty looked at the puppet stage from all angles, the curtain discussion began. Although this was mostly a non-verbal experience, it was an important part of the inquiry. The children were debating if the curtains should be open for the show or if they should be closed with the puppets sticking out from underneath.



A more reserved child, Marty, preferred to have the curtains closed. His perspective, however, changed after he asked Ms. Sue, an instructional assistant, to do a puppet show. The children eagerly became audience members as Ms. Sue named and manipulated the puppets. When she was finished, Jazzy and Marty performed the first student-led puppet show. Jazzy's puppets sang as Marty opened the

curtains and asked other children to clap.



children. However, as I continued my observations, I noticed the number of audience members was dwindling. The children were packed behind the stage moving the puppets and making them talk. At that point, the project became an investigation of the different types of puppets and how they are made.



This day was a turning point in the project. After my initial observations, I assumed the children would want to perform a puppet show. They enjoyed when the puppets read to them, and they were creating storylines that involved many



DEVELOPING THE PROJECT

As I prepared for the new direction of the project, I remembered a puppetry workshop I had previously taken at The Children's Museum of Indianapolis. The museum has an expansive educational section on its website, and it includes a kindergarten through second grade unit of study titled "Puppets: Here, There and Everywhere." As I read through the material and thought about the interests and abilities of my children, I focused on four types of puppets – finger, paper bag, stick and shadow.

Finger Puppets (February 20, 2008)

To begin our work with finger puppets, I printed Disney characters in color and laminated them for use at the puppet stage. The same characters were available in black and white for the children to color and make their own finger puppets. Although they found favorite characters, this attempt was flawed. First, it was difficult to make the puppets small enough for the children's fingers. Second, the children had no ownership for these puppets, and therefore, did not value the play.

After researching finger puppets, I came across the film canister. Using a 35mm canister, poly-fiber can be inserted and formed around the children's finger, thus creating a secure fit and truly child-created puppet. They delighted in selecting pom

poms for heads, chenille stems for arms and scraps of fabric for clothes. These puppets found their way safely to the stage as the children compared their efforts.

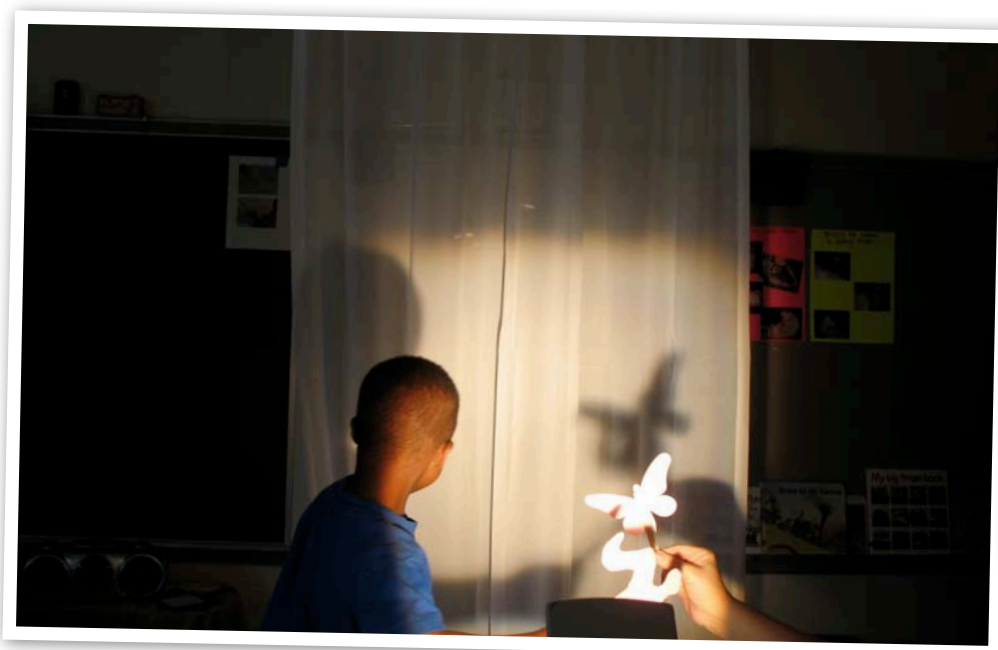
Paper Bag Puppets (February 25, 2008)

The children's interest in the project continued past finger puppets, so we moved into paper bag puppets. I was eager to try this type, because the flap of the bags would let the children attempt more puppet manipulation and conversation.

As a class, we talked about the difference between the two styles of puppets by moving a finger and then opening and closing our hands. Excited by our circle time, the children moved to the puppet-making center where they found brown paper bags, yarn and lace, beads and other art supplies awaiting them. Again, other than the type of puppet, they were given the freedom to create their representations. We had worked a lot on portraits this year, and many of the puppets had recognizable facial features.

Capitalizing on the bag flap, we worked on some conversation at the puppet stage, primarily adult to child. The focus was on asking and answering simple questions, such as name and favorite activity.





Stick Puppets

(February 27, 2008)

The children took facial features to the next level when they created their stick puppets. They were provided with a popsicle stick, body outline and a selection of art materials. The children transformed the outline into representations of themselves. It was interesting to watch the intent in which the children worked – trying to match clothing color and design.

For our first attempts with the stick puppets, we sang "Going on a Bear Hunt." The song is extremely popular in the classes, and the children enjoy the movements and are able to recite the lines. I sang the first line and my puppet acted out the movement, and the children repeated the words and the actions.

One of the most amazing experiences occurred on the second day with the stick puppets. To introduce a new texture to the project, I placed an overhead projector at the front of the room.

Jordan, 5, began the year in the morning class and transferred to the afternoon. While in the morning class, Jordan participated in a project on shadow and light. To be honest, Jordan did more than participate; he initiated the project with his interest in making hand shadows during recess. During this project, he had several explorations with the overhead projector and

shadow creation in the classroom.

Jordan is a child with Downs Syndrome and a moderate mental handicap. But, on day two with the stick puppets he found a leadership role. Jordan turned on the overhead projector and began making full-body shadows. After he and his classmates delighted in this play, Jordan used his hands to make shadows, just as he had done on the playground and in the morning class. Jordan's experience and the collaboration of his friends deepened the work with stick puppets and led us to shadow puppets.

Nick: "It's Joey! No, it Rick!"

Ethan: "Mine is Joey!"

Jordan: "Look, I fly. (Jordan used his hands to make a butterfly.)"

Nick: "Ricky jumps!"

Carlos: "Puppet's name is Carlos."

Nick: "There's four people. They're gonna play."

Carlos: "Why you here? My puppet fell down. Help me! He fell off a rock! He have rope. He climb rope."

Danny, 3: "My puppet want to jump."

Nick: "The brother said be careful. Jump! Jump! Jump!"

Danny: "My puppet. He want to go. Come on, Nick! He need to go!"

Nick to Jordan: "Do you want to play with the mommy?"

Jordan: "Yeah! Hi! Hi! Look!"

All boys laugh.



Ethan: "I need an ambulance."
Caege, 3: "I help you.
I a doctor."



Shadow Puppets

(March 3, 2008)

Building upon the popularity of the stick puppets, the children created shadow puppets with simple outlines of objects and cellophane. In the morning class, there were a variety of puppets, from castles or horses to buses. In the afternoon class, the puppets were primarily buses.

Nick: "My bus is getting bigger! People on the bus go up and down."

Nick found the size of the shadow changed as he moved closer to and further away from the overhead projector.

Ethan's stick puppet had a bent leg, and the buses became ambulances.

Guest Expert Visit (March 5, 2008)

Ms. Nancy, the Warren Early Childhood Center's coordinator of childcare, is a member of a puppet ministry; therefore, she was able to lend some expertise to the project. On March 5, Ms. Nancy spent 30 minutes with each class showcasing different puppet styles, talking about puppet movement and giving the children hands-on experience. She showed them how a puppet walks up to the stage and how a puppet can move its arms using a human arm glove.

Although the children enjoyed all of her puppets, a few styles made an impact on the group.

One stick puppet was simply a foam core head with a hair scrunchy mouth. A piece of fishing line was tied to the scrunchy, and when pulled, it appeared as if the puppet was talking. Three girls elected to make the "scrunchy mouth" puppet during choice time.

The children immediately connected the muppet puppet to Ernie from Sesame Street.

Jazzy: "Him's Ernie!"

Ms. Nancy: "No, he's not Ernie."

Nyla, 5: "He's Ernie's friend. He looks like Ernie."

The final puppet was a long monkey whose arms and legs wrapped around the puppeteer. The monkey had been used in many shows and was beginning to show wear-and-tear.

Ashton, 3: "He doesn't have eye."

Nick: "He blinking."

Ms. Nancy did not have a marionette to show the groups, but she described the style of puppet. So, the next day I read

Pinocchio to the classes.

The children were not familiar with the tale and were amazed that a puppet could really talk and become a real boy.

At choice time, I found Nick behind the puppet stage with tools and the store-bought hand puppets.

Nick: "I'm fixing puppets so they can talk. Then they will be real. They have to write their names all by themselves. This one (duck) will have lips. I will hang him up so he can dry. He doesn't have teeth, because he doesn't bite."



CONCLUDING THE PROJECT



The culminating activity was always in the back of my mind throughout the project. Adzooks facilitated the puppetry workshop I took at The Children's Museum of Indianapolis. Robin Lee Holm and David Wright, the Adzooks puppeteers, present 250 shows and workshops to 20,000 participants annually



In a workshop titled "Anything Can Be a Puppet," Adzooks helped each child create and animate a found object puppet – a puppet made from spoons, spatulas, toy rakes and any material found around the house.



throughout Indiana and nationwide. With the assistance of Young Audiences of Indiana, Adzooks came to the Warren Early Childhood Center for a two-hour workshop with my classes that combined for the experience.





Adzooks began by showing the children how a finger and a hand can be a puppet. With a few embellishments, Robin's hand became a spider; and Marty, Jordan and Nyla assisted in the enactment of "The Itsy Bitsy Spider." The first emphasis of the workshop was asking and answering two questions – "What is your name?" and "What do you like to do?" With each introduction, the class responded with a greeting.

Robin and David then showed the children objects from the classroom, such as keys from the

dramatic play area, a block and a book. They animated the objects as the children guessed what action the puppet was performing. This transitioned into the use of a spoon and shovel, and Robin made "Grammy" in front of the children with a spoon, foam shapes, chenille stems and fabric.

All: "What's your name?"

Robin: "Grammy."

All: "Hi Grammy."

Caegen, "Wow!"



There was a true buzz in the room as the children moved to three tables with their spoons, shovels and spatulas. The tables were stocked with found materials, and the children were free to create their puppets.

Carlos: "Here are my eyes."
 Ethan: "My eyes are green."
 Nick: "This is a smile."
 Nyla: "My mom wears earrings. She always wears earrings. I can make earrings and eyelashes

too."
 Nick: "This heart is my eye."
 Nyla: "This gives me an idea."
 Ethan: "Hair, I need hair."

After the children created their puppet, they moved to the costume table.

Ashton, 3: "My friend is a lion. Roar!"

As the costumes were complete, the children freely moved around the classroom with the puppets, and many found their way to the stage. Adzooks soon brought the group together, and the children introduced their puppets one at a time, asking and answering the two questions – "What is your name?" and "What do you like to do?"

I felt the workshop was successful, but I didn't realize the impact until I spoke with Joel, 3, and Marty's parents a few days later. Joel's mother said he continued to play with his found object puppet, and Marty's parents said every spoon in their home was now a puppet, because Marty and his sister thought it was "so neat."



TEACHER REFLECTION



The Puppet Project did not develop in the manner in which I expected, but that is what made it a truly rewarding and successful experience.

It is easy to underestimate the importance of a popsicle stick until you see it turn into a puppet and children engage in self-initiated dialogue and play.



Projects are more than building to a culminating event. They are about the observations and listening to the children, and they are about letting go as a classroom teacher and allowing the interests and skills of the smallest learner to be the guide.



An overhead projector is merely a source of light, until a student with Downs Syndrome and a moderate mental handicap creates shadows and becomes a classroom leader.



INDIANA FOUNDATIONS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

ADDRESSED THROUGH THE PROJECT

English/Language Arts

- F.1.7 Tell something that a favorite character does in a story.
- F.1.14 Watch and listen to a story to completion or for ten or more minutes.
- F.1.37 Ask and answer simple questions about a story being read.
- F.1.38 Ask adult to read printed information.
- F.1.42 Pretend to do something or be someone.
- F.1.43 Use new vocabulary learned from experiences.
- F.1.44 Act out familiar, scripted events and routines.
- F.2.2 Request or select a story by the title of the book.
- F.2.3 Tell simple stories from pictures and books.
- F.2.4 Express what might happen after the action in a picture.
- F.2.5 Tell one thing that happens in a familiar story.
- F.3.2 Actively look for or keep attending to things that an adult points to, shows, or talks about.
- F.3.13 Talk about the cover and illustrations prior to the story being read.
- F.4.1 Draw pictures and scribble to generate and express ideas.
- F.4.6 Position paper for writing.
- F.4.7 Write from left to right.
- F.4.8 Write using pictures, letters, and words.
- F.4.9 Use writing or symbols to share an idea with someone.
- F.5.4 Draw name or a message on a card or picture.

- F.5.5 Give writing to someone as a means of communication.
- F.7.17 Initiate turn taking in play.
- F.7.20 Repeat simple sentences as presented.
- F.7.21 Engage in reciprocal conversations for two to three exchanges
- F.7.30 Pick from two ideas to talk about.

Mathematics

- F.1.21 Pass out objects or food to people or characters.
- F.3.13 Categorize familiar objects by function and class.
- F.6.8 Identify similarities and differences in objects.
- F.6.18 Imitate the use of an adult tool in play.
- F.6.19 See a simple task through to completion.

Science

- F.1.2 Interact with and explore a variety of objects, books, and materials.
- F.3.1 Participate in activities using materials with a variety of properties (e.g., color, shape, size, name, type of material).

Social Studies

- F.1.2 Relate new experiences to past experiences.
- F.3.28 Pretend to take care of a doll by feeding and other activities.
- F.3.29 Play the role of different family members through dramatic play.

- F.3.36 Help clean up after doing an activity.
- F.5.9 Use interpersonal skills of sharing and taking turns in interactions with others.

Music

- F.1.2 Verbally express enjoyment.
- F.1.3 Sing along to familiar songs.

Visual Arts

- F.2.1 Participate freely in dramatic play activities that become more extended and complex.
- F.2.2 Express self in dramatic play through story telling, puppetry, and other language development activities.
- F.2.3 Compare and contrast own creations and those of others.
- F.2.7 Show individuality by actions such as drawing a pumpkin that differs in color and design from the traditional.
- F.2.8 Engage in cooperative pretend play with another
- F.2.10 Use objects as symbols for other things. (e.g., a scarf to represent bird wings or a box to represent a car)
- F.2.11 Pretend through role-playing.
- F.2.14 Watch an activity before entering into it.
- F.2.15 Enjoy repetition of materials and activities to further explore, manipulate, and exercise the imagination.
- F.2.19 Use a variety of materials to create original work.

