

Martha Mullenbach. Testing the use of puppets for story retention. A Master's paper for the M.S. in L.S. degree. July, 1999. 33 pages. Advisor: Evelyn H. Daniel

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the use of puppets in story telling situations can help students retain information. To explore this question on a small scale, three classes of North Carolina fourth graders were told three different North Carolina folktales, using a different presentation method for each folktale. The tales were told with either a puppet as narrator, using flannel board figures from the tale or told without any aids. Data on the children's ability to retain information from each story was collected via questionnaires completed one week after the presentation of a story. Results indicate that puppets were not the most effective method to aid retention of information. Several factors identified as affecting the results are discussed here.

Headings

1. Puppetry—Elementary media centers
2. Storytelling,--(Elementary education)
3. Information, Retention of—(Elementary education)

TESTING THE USE OF PUPPETS FOR STORY RETENTION

by
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INTRODUCTION

For centuries puppets have been used as valuable teaching tools. In the South East Asian countries shadow puppets are used to deliver information and help adults understand and remember different concepts, especially religious teachings. Europeans later created rod style puppets to use for the same type of education. The “Every Man” religious play was written and performed during the middle ages in England to teach church concepts and morals to adults. The play was performed in village streets by puppeteers holding life size rod puppets. The puppets were held aloft so everyone could see their actions. Today this play is still being performed in some places although the performances today are more for entertainment than for education.ⁱ

As an undergraduate student at the University of Washington, Seattle, I was fortunate to take classes with a master puppeteer, Aurora Valentinetti. When she turned 70 years old, she retired from teaching, but not performing. Her classes covered the construction, manipulation, and use of puppets as well as the history of puppetry.

A new world of creativity opened to me. The materials used to create puppets and the ways they can be used are limited only by one’s imagination. An old sock becomes a caterpillar; a child’s stuffed animal or rag doll becomes a marionette when thread or fishing line is tied onto the limbs and used to manipulate the object. Paper figures attached to straws become rod puppets or shadow puppets when used with an overhead projector.

Many books and Internet sites are available to anyone who wants to learn how to make and use puppets. Only one’s lack of knowledge and experience limit the use of

ⁱ. According to Aurora Valentinetti, a Methodist church in Seattle Washington performed this play as late as the early 1990s as an art form.

puppetry as a teaching tool.

Diana Anderson echoes this attitude and explores the perceptions of librarians toward puppets and their use. For her master's paper she used a questionnaire about puppetry and its use by media specialists as part of their programs in the Garland Independent School District. The results of her questionnaire

“indicated that 47% of the librarians do use puppets in their programs, in a variety of ways, and with enthusiasm. Lack of experience and/or training was the most common reason for not using puppets, but there was genuine interest in receiving formal guidance in the future” (abstract).

Various organizations use puppets to teach children and enable the children to express their needs and ideas. Puppet use in classrooms in schools K-12 has increased in conjunction with whole language literature and integrated cross curriculum lessons.

This study will examine puppetry use in the library media center as a teaching tool. Three stories are needed that can be told easily in three different ways. The stories need to be age appropriate and the classes used should be similar in make up and in the same school complex. Using a puppet as a narrator will require finding some that will match the stories in some way (i.e., as a main character in the story or a character who would have witnessed the action). The storyteller will have to practice telling the stories using the puppets to be competent when presenting the stories.

I am hoping to show that the returns on a media center specialists investments, of both time and money will be worthwhile. I realize this kind of information is hard to prove. If there is the slightest significance in my findings, they may open the door to further investigation by media specialists.

LITERATURE EXAMINATION

Puppetry is both an entertainment vehicle, and an educational vehicle. This study focuses on the effectiveness of puppetry as an educational vehicle. Currently puppets are used in many areas of children's education. Some examples below come from health education, school counselors main-streaming, cross curricular teaching, as well as specific units of study such as language arts, and social studies. Many of the articles reviewed for this paper included attitudes toward creation and benefits of puppets, the many different areas in which they can be used as well as the benefits of puppetry in education.

In the Journal of School Health, April 1999, Linda Baily Synovitz presents a case for using puppets when teaching school health programs. She states: "To promote various health concepts, puppetry has potential for greater use within the coordinated school health program, including counseling, school health services, and school health education" (p.145).

Numerous health education topics can be approached with puppets. Sensitive issues, such as HIV/AIDS education is taught by several groups with the aid of puppets. Suicide is another sensitive area where puppets can communicate the seriousness of the topic without alarming students. Synovitz comments on a puppet show developed in 1985 by Bernhardt and Praeger to use in death education for elementary school students (para.10). She quotes statistics from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention showing that the suicide rate for children 10-14 has doubled in the last 15 years. For younger children, the concept of germs and how they are spread is taught in Head Start classes and other preschools. Synovitz, in a paper presented at the national conference of the American School Health Association: October 1994, states that this program was created and administered by college peer health educators.

Puppets are used in school counseling with the aim of helping children express their feelings. Sometimes talking to a puppet or using a puppet to express feelings is less threatening than talking directly to an adult.

We can include under the topic of social health the issue of acceptance of differences as addressed by the “Kids on the Block” puppet show. In Nation's Business, Feb. 1986 Barbara Aiello, former special education teacher, explains how she created the show and the concept behind it. She says that an unhappy special education student prompted her to create a show to aid acceptance of students as they were mainstreamed into regular classes per Public Law 94-142. Students in mainstream classes had a hard time accepting students with disabilities. By creating puppets with disabilities and other puppets without disabilities to ask the questions most students had, Aiello was able to answer these questions in regular classrooms before disabled students were introduced. This aided class members in their acceptance of others who are different.

Puppets today are used in the classroom as a means of resolving classroom conflicts. Puppets can act out common conflicts without pointing to a particular student or group of students. Mary Beth Spann in Instructor (March 1994 p. 24) states that “Using them [puppets] as teaching strategies allows children to think about the causes of conflict without feeling defensive or blaming others.”

Marilyn Anderson, Alex Tresniowski, and Paula Yoo wrote an article in People Weekly about a teacher, Gary Jones, who created Backstreet USA Puppet Theatre specifically to help children ages 4 to 12 deal with particular issues. One of the most important is conflict resolution. The message Jones wants his puppets to convey is that “you don’t have to fight.” Jones believes “The puppet is mightier than the sword. Kids have all this creative energy, if you have art and music in schools, then you won’t have a problem with violence” (12). A principal for an inner city school in New Jersey noted that not a single student was suspended for fighting during Jones’ two-week visit. Jones created his puppet troupe and show after the 1992 riots in Los Angeles to help children

deal with the trauma.

Puppets can also help students understand concepts of social differences and traditions in the area of social studies. Making Bunraku puppets and performing a traditional Japanese Bunraku play helps students understand cultural differences.

Vietnamese culture is also taught using traditional Vietnamese water puppets. Gloria Contrearras (The Social Studies Jan-Feb 1995) gives a brief history of the Vietnam water puppets and describes a project for upper elementary-school age children that will help them understand how people adapt to the environment and situations.

George W. Chilcoat, an associate professor of social studies education at Brigham Young University, in an article written for The Social Studies (Nov-Dec 1996), describes a social studies activity for the classroom that is similar to the living newspaper form created in the 1930's by the Federal Theater Project.ⁱⁱ This activity would help the students learn problem solving skills while gaining a knowledge of the social problems confronting today's citizens.

Puppetry use is also advocated in other areas of education. Carolyn Brodie in her article, "Puppet Magic" (School Library Media Activities Monthly, Dec. 1994) states that

"Puppetry can be an exciting and creative venture for library media specialists, teachers, and students. Puppetry can contribute many valuable things to the education of children. It can promote storytelling and reading; foster self esteem; lead to creative thinking and use of the imagination; develop manual dexterity; promote artistic talent; enhance

ⁱⁱ Chilcoat explains that the Federal Theater Project evolved from "a proletarian theater movement". This theater dramatized the conditions of the working class, hoping to promote social change by making people aware to class differences. The government subsidized theater known as the Federal Theater Project as a way to put people back to work in the theater industry. One goal of this project was to encourage active political participation in an effort to improve society. To accomplish this, the Project worked to introduce theater and workshops to small neighborhoods.

many curriculum areas; provide an opportunity for problem-solving and, of course, it can be fun!”(p.43).

When the librarian and teacher collaborate on lessons, puppets can be a part of cross-curricular learning. Researching a subject, writing a puppet play and performing it can unite research skills, social studies, reading, language arts and art.

Nancy Renfro, a professional puppeteer authored and co-authored several puppetry books to introduce teachers and librarians to the great flexibility of puppetry as a teaching tool. In one book, Puppetry in Early Childhood Education, Tamara Hunt and Nancy Renfro state that:

“Using puppetry offers a magnificent opportunity to serve the teacher as a tool in broadening these dimensions [languages of color and texture, forms and shapes, patterns and body movement] offering a great degree of flexibility in meeting the requirements of the classroom. . . . For the child, the introduction of puppets can create a fresh and creative learning environment.”

Another advantage mentioned by Renfro was one of softening the hard edges of academic subjects. She further states that Sesame Street is an example of the advantages the children gain through “the reinforcement of additional sensory impressions” (p.17).

Margaret Marshall, Senior Lecturer, School of Librarianship, Leeds Polytechnic, agrees that using puppets along with other forms of visual media “form a valuable aid to encouraging perception and discrimination while creating an extra information guide to understanding words” (p.2, “Storytelling–Why Do It?” in Storytelling: Practical Guides). Marshall advocates the use of puppets for helping with language experience to help reading skills.

Connie Champlin, an experienced storyteller and puppeteer who works in classrooms, libraries, and workshops globally, wrote the second edition of Storytelling with Puppets, after collaborating with Nancy Renfro on the first edition. She feels that coupling the renewal of storytelling with added emphasis on school reading programs will play a primary role in “developing enthusiastic readers rather than merely teaching children

how to read.” She further states: “Research shows that successful reading programs provide an opportunity to engage in a variety of activities related to books. Retelling a story or a poem with puppets is an excellent way for children to expand their reading experience” (Preface xiii). Champlin explains that puppets were used by storytellers before a written language to illustrate and animate their stories.

David Currell in Learning With Puppets, expresses the feeling that the “benefits of puppetry in education provide a stimulus for and consolidation of learning by confronting new concepts and providing reinforcement with practice of puppet use” (p.10). He feels that puppets are important in learning communication skills and that puppets are safe vehicles for expressing ideas and feelings.

Puppets can be utilized in multiple areas of study: English, acting, historic concepts and many more areas. They allow children to practice skills learned in different areas. Meher R. Contractor writing in Creative Drama and Puppetry in Education agrees with this idea stating that “These arts can be of great help to teachers . . . if they are properly used. They offer a method of learning by doing rather than memorization” (p.3).

The school media specialist role in a school setting according to Information Power is one of a partner with the classroom teacher. Champlin feels that this is “an indispensable role in an effective literature-based reading program” (preface xiii). She feels the puppet is a good audio-visual tool the librarian can use for teaching through storytelling using puppets to add “a profound new dimension . . . one that appeals to both children and adults” (p.4). This new dimension is added “When one weaves animated puppets into the fiber of a story, the impact of the story and its characters upon the child [to] become a powerful multi sensory experience” (p.5). This statement echoes several others quoted above.

Nancy Renfro wrote another book, A Puppet Corner in Every Library in collaboration with children’s librarian Ann Weiss Schwalb. The book promotes a corner

in the library where children can use puppets as part of their library visits. They may be used for collaborative lessons with the teachers and also for story telling. The book was written for librarians in both school and public library settings.

Many articles appearing in library journals are geared for the public library use of puppets. The ideas can be adapted for a school setting if students also participate in the puppet plays. One article in Youth Services in Libraries, (Fall, 1993) by Fred O'Hara, professor emeritus of Long Island University's Palmer School of Library and Information Science tells of his retirement from working with federal documents to become a volunteer in a public library story hour beginning as a reader and becoming a puppeteer. His closing sentences provide a clue as to why librarians enjoy using puppets. He says, "No one had a better time that summer than I did! And the kids? My guess is they enjoyed it too . . ." (p. 89).

Alan Jack Hicks, in an article: "The Power to Enchant: Puppets in the Public Illinois Libraries, Winter 1996 (p.30-35) talks about the program for puppet shows started in the Deerfield Public Library. The program first started as a way to draw children in for other programs. They have found that the shows take a lot of time and effort to write, make scenery for and find or make appropriate puppets to perform. He does admit later in the article that one reason for continuing the puppet plays is the satisfaction and enjoyment the whole library staff, including all departments, gains from working together and "they are a diverting activity that charges up my internal batteries and those of all the staff" (p.31). This is in addition to keeping the mission statement clear in regards to the younger library users.

School media specialists do not need to mount ambitious puppet theater programs. Nancy Renfro suggests the storyteller sit down and make the lap the stage (A Puppet Corner in Every Library). Many other articles and books are geared to helping librarians and teachers create simple puppets and simple shows. Background is not as important to children as the characters, according to Prudence Taylor in her article "Puppets-Perennial

Favorites.”

With all the information available on how to set up a puppet theater, how to incorporate their use into collaborative and cross curriculum lessons, there are no articles addressing how effective puppets are in helping children retain information in a storytelling setting. For example: David Currell states that using puppetry in education “provides a stimulus for and consolidation of learning by confronting new concepts and providing reinforcements with practice of puppet use” (p.10).

Other people looking for more explicit information about the use of puppetry in the media center have also been unable to find any thing specifically addressing librarian use of puppets and their effectiveness in learning situations. When Diana Anderson proposed to do a study in Texas to find out “if and how elementary librarians use puppets as tools in their curriculum, she found no similar studies. She broadened her search “to include educators’ attitudes toward puppets, the values of puppetry, and the multifaceted uses of puppets in a library setting” (abstract) but still found no similar studies.

The materials available show that puppets have been used for centuries to impart knowledge to adults. Children enjoy watching the puppet perform, but do they retain the information better if it is dispensed by a puppet? This study sets out to test the question on a small scale. Puppets have been used for centuries to help adults attain and retain information and concepts. Can puppets be used effectively in a school media storytelling setting to help students with information retention? Comparing three methods of telling stories in library/classroom settings, will puppetry prove to be the most effective, less effective, or ineffective as a teaching aid in a story telling situation?

Some definitions of terms used in the study are as follows:

Retention: The ability to recall information imparted at an earlier date.

- Concepts:** Ideas and other non-tangible thoughts that interconnect.
- Storytelling:** Relating a story to an audience without using printed material. The story may be in the form of a folktale, a poem, myth, legend, or the storyteller's interpretation of a book.
- Puppets:** Any inanimate objects given life through movement.

METHODOLOGY

This study was done in accordance with the fourth grade requirements for the state of North Carolina. Among other things, fourth grade classes in North Carolina study the state of North Carolina, including its literature and folktales. Three folktales originating in the state were used for this study.

The district is very large and expanding rapidly. To better utilize shrinking facilities, several of the schools in this district are now year round magnet schools. I chose to do the study at a large year round magnet school with more than 1000 pre-K through fifth grade children enrolled. The school divided the student population in this facility into four tracks with at least two classes in each grade level. Three sections or “tracks” are always using the building at any one time and a fourth “track” or section is out for a three-week break. The students and their teachers take their vacation in small increments year round rather than in one long time span over the summer. Three fourth grade teachers willingly agreed to have their students listen to the stories as part of their unit on North Carolina. All three classes are on a different “track” or schedule.

Each of the three fourth grade classes participating were similar in size, age and socioeconomic status. Each of the participating classes heard all three stories told in the same order, but told in one of three methods: with a puppet as the narrator, with a flannel board for a prop, or just a story without any props.

The reason for using two special props was to prevent any skewing of the research because students might remember better a story if any special prop is used. Class “A” (**A**) heard the first story without any form of prop. Class “B” (**B**) heard the same story using a flannel board as a prop, and Class “C” (**C**) heard the story with a puppet as the narrator.

A heard the second story with a puppet as the narrator, **B** heard the same story without any props and **C** listened to the story with a flannel board for a prop. For the third story **A** listened to and had a flannel board as an aid, **B** listened to the story told by a puppet and **C** had no special prop for the story.

The stories were all told in the classroom at the same time of day (10:30 A.M.), one week apart. Each teacher scheduled the stories while they were studying the literature of North Carolina unit. None of the classes heard the stories during the same time frame, (i.e., same week) although during the same unit of study.

The teller was introduced to the class as a student librarian. The teacher explained that this person was studying with the school media specialists to learn how to tell folk tales. On the second visit, the children were asked to fill in the answers on a short questionnaire about the story told the previous week. They were asked NOT to put their names on the papers. The emphasis was on answering the questions the best they could; this was not a test for them, but a way for the storyteller to find out if he or she was doing a good job of telling stories. The children were never under pressure for a grade or corrections. All three classes used the same question sheets. All three classes knew that future storytelling did not depend on their answers. No matter what they answered, they would hear three stories over the three-week period.

Students were asked to mark their question sheets with a “smiley” face if they had heard the story before. All sheets with a “smiley” face were discarded and not included in the results, as the intent was to test for retention of information after hearing a story for the first time.

The completed questionnaires were put away without corrections or tallying until all the stories were told in all the classrooms. This helped the teller continue telling the story without the temptation to tell any story with a different emphasis or to change the questions.

The questionnaire contained fill-in-the-blank, multiple choice and/or true/false questions that could be quickly answered. The questions pertained to the action, order of occurrences, characters in the story and/or the setting. (See Appendix A for copies of all three questionnaires) In each class the students were given 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

The last questionnaire was filled in the week after the third story. If time permitted and the teacher approved, the children heard another story completely unrelated to the study.

The stories were chosen after consultation and approval of the school media specialist. Care was taken to choose folktales that originated in North Carolina, and would not normally be used in the students' regular visits to the media center.

The first story, Soap! Soap! Don't Forget the Soap!ⁱⁱⁱ (Soap, Soap) is a favorite story from the Appalachian Mountains of Western North Carolina. The main character in the book is very absent-minded. One day his mother sends him to town for a bar of soap on bath day. His absent-mindedness and habit of repeating the last thing said to him causes Plug (the hero) trouble with everyone he meets on the way to town.

The second story was Possum, Turtle, and the Wolves^{iv} as told by Doug Elliott at the National Storytelling Festival. The tale is credited to a Cherokee Indian elder in the 1800's. According to Mr. Elliott, (p.135) the story is believed to have elements of African origin interwoven by the time the story was recorded. The story is reminiscent of Brer Rabbit and the Briar Patch. After a greedy wolf interrupts Possum and Turtle as they are having a quiet picnic of fresh persimmons, he chokes to death while trying to swallow a persimmon whole. While on a trip through the woods, the woodland creatures think that

ⁱⁱⁱ Birdseye, Tom. Soap! Soap! Don't Forget the Soap! An Appalachian Folktale. New York: Holiday House, Inc. 1993.

^{iv} Selected by the National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling, Best-Loved Stories Told at the National Storytelling Festival, 1991. pp. 135.

the turtle had killed a wolf by himself. The turtle is then surrounded by the other wolves who try to devise a way to kill him. His reply to each idea was “but please don’t throw me off the cliff” (and thus into the river where he would be free).

The third story was one from the Coastal region of North Carolina, called The Maco Light.^v Several different sources had versions of this story. The version most closely followed by the storyteller was written by Jim McAmis with Craig Dominey and featured in October 1998 on the Moonlit Night Web page for storytellers. This is a ghost story that supposedly happened one night when a conductor lost his head while trying to stop the oncoming train before it hit his uncoupled caboose.

The puppets used as narrators were appropriate for each story. The first narrator was a hand puppet of Plug, the absent-minded mountain boy. A glove puppet of a turtle told his own tale, and an all-seeing barn owl told the story of what happened to the conductor, Joe, in the Maco, North Carolina swamp that night.

A book of flannel board figures^{vi} was used as the source of flannel board pieces. Materials in the book could be interchanged. Permission was given to reproduce the figures for nonprofit use.

^v http://www.themoonlitroad.com/members/archives/macolight/macolight_page001.html

^{vi} Vonk, Idalee. Storytelling With the Flannel Board, Book Three. Minneapolis, Minnesota: T.S.Dennison, Inc.

RESULTS

All results from the questionnaires were tallied and then converted to percentages of correct and incorrect answers. This was done to compensate for any difference in the size of the audience, and the number of children who had heard a story before.

The results of this study are presented on several charts below.

The first set of charts shows that using a puppet was the least effective method of helping a child retain information for two of the stories.

Figure 1
Percentage/results for the first story:
Soap, Soap

| Percentages | Story told using a puppet as narrator | Story told using a flannel board | Story told without prop |
|--|--|---|--------------------------------|
| Number of Children answering questions | 12* | 30 | 27 |
| Percentage of Correct answers | 79.17 % | 84.38% | 82.87% |
| Percentage of Incorrect answers | 20.83% | 15.627% | 17.13% |
| Class | C | B | A |

* More students were present while the story was presented, however many had heard the story before. Therefore, their questionnaires were not included in the tally.

Figure 2
Percentage/results for the second story
Possum, Turtle and the Wolves

| Percentages | Story told using a puppet as narrator | Story told using a flannel board | Story told without prop |
|--|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Number of Children answering questions | 24 | 25 | 27 |
| Percentage of Correct answers | 76.56% | 78% | 82.87% |
| Percentage of Incorrect answers | 23.44% | 22% | 17.13% |
| Class | A | C | B |

The third story, The Maco Light, had the lowest percentage of correct answers attributed to the class hearing a story without props. The middle score was that of the story told with a puppet, but less than 10% higher than the lowest score.

Figure 3
Percentage/results for the third story
The Maco Light

| Percentages | Story told using a puppet as narrator | Story told using a flannel board | Story told without prop |
|--|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Number of Children answering questions | 29 | 29 | 20 |
| Percentage of Correct answers | 66.9% | 83.1% | 61.5% |
| Percentage of Incorrect answers | 33.1% | 16.9% | 38.5% |
| Class | B | A | C |

Using a flannel board for the last story helped with retention most with almost 15 percent more correct answers than the questionnaire percentage score of the class who heard the story told by a puppet. The flannel board presentation questionnaire scored

highest with the first story, Soap, Soap. (fig. 1) The percentage points of correct answers were less than two percentage points higher than the total of correct answers after telling the story without a prop. The correct answers after telling the story with a puppet were three plus points behind the second place method of telling the story, without any props.

When comparing the percentage of correct answers on charts according to the method of storytelling (with puppets, with a flannel board, and without a prop) one can see a pattern. The percentage correct score for The Maco Light is well below the correct answer percentage of the other two stories. This would be remarkable if the correct answer percentages for this story were not also very low for the presentation without using a prop.

Figure 4
Percentage/results of the stories told
with puppets

| Percentages | <u>Soap, Soap</u> | <u>Possum, Turtle and the Wolves</u> | <u>The Maco Light</u> |
|--|--------------------------|---|------------------------------|
| Number of Children answering questions | 12 | 24 | 29 |
| Percentage of answers correct | 79.17 % | 76.56% | 66.9% |
| Percentage of answers incorrect | 20.83 | 23.44% | 33.1% |
| Class | C | A | B |

The scores from telling the stories with a puppet as narrator show similar correct percentage scores for two stories, Soap, Soap, and Possum, Turtle and the Wolves, both in the mid 70 percent range.

Figure 5
Percentage/results of the stories told
with flannel board figures

| Percentages | <u>Soap, Soap</u> | <u>Possum, Turtle and the Wolves</u> | <u>The Maco Light</u> |
|--|--------------------------|---|------------------------------|
| Number of Children answering questions | 28 | 25 | 29 |
| Percentage of answers correct | 84.38% | 78% | 83.1% |
| Percentage of answers incorrect | 15.62% | 22% | 16.9% |
| Class | B | C | A |

The questionnaire results shown on the chart for percentage of correct scores for stories heard using a flannel board as a prop show a different pattern. The scores have higher overall correct percentage rates when using the flannel board. The lowest correct percentage points were a little over six percentage points less than the highest.

Not using props as a method of telling resulted in scores in the 80 percent range for two of the stories (Soap, Soap and Possum, Turtle and the Wolves). The score for the last story, The Maco Light, was much lower (Fig. 6). When we compare the percentage correct by classes we find that this class had lower scores in general (Fig.9). The percentages correct when this story was told using a puppet as narrator was also low (Fig. 4). The highest percentage of correct answers for The Maco Light was found when a flannel board was used as a prop (Fig. 5).

Figure 6
Percentage/results of the stories told
without props

| Percentages | <u>Soap, Soap</u> | <u>Possum, Turtle and the Wolves</u> | <u>The Maco Light</u> |
|--|--------------------------|---|------------------------------|
| Number of Children answering questions | 27 | 27 | 20 |
| Percentage of answers correct | 82.87% | 82.87% | 61.5% |
| Percentage of answers incorrect | 17.13% | 17.13% | 38.5% |
| Class | A | B | C |

The charts comparing score percentages by classes show that Class A (Fig. 7) and Class B (Fig. 8) had higher percentages of correct answers, both with more than 80 percent in the categories of stories told without props, Soap, Soap for Class A and Possum, Turtle and the Wolves in Class B and the stories told using a flannel board as a prop. Both of their percentages of correct answers for stories told with a puppet are lower.

Figure 7
Class A percentage/results all stories

| Percentages | <u>Soap, Soap</u> (No props) | <u>Possum, Turtle and the Wolves</u> (with a puppet) | <u>The Maco Light</u> (with the flannel board) |
|--|---|---|---|
| Number of Children answering questions | 27 | 24 | 29 |
| Percentage of answers correct | 82.87% | 76.56% | 83.10% |
| Percentage of answers incorrect | 17.13% | 23.44% | 15.62 % |

Figure 8
Class B percentage/results all stories

| Percentages | <u>Soap, Soap</u> (with flannel board figures) | <u>Possum, Turtle and the Wolves</u> (No props) | <u>The Maco Light</u> (with a puppet) |
|--|--|---|---|
| Number of Children answering questions | 30 | 27 | 29 |
| Percentage of answers correct | 84.38% | 82.87% | 66.9% |
| Percentage of answers incorrect | 15.62% | 17.13% | 33.1% |

The percentage of correct answers in Class C (Fig. 9) are, overall, lower than those of classes A and B. The highest was the story told with a puppet, Soap, Soap. The lowest was the story told without any props, The Maco Light.

Figure 9
Class C percentage/results all stories

| Percentages | <u>Soap, Soap</u> (with a puppet) | <u>Possum, Turtle and the Wolves</u> (with the flannel board) | <u>The Maco Light</u> (No props) |
|--|---|---|--|
| Number of Children answering questions | 12* | 25 | 20 |
| Percentage of answers correct | 79.17% | 78% | 61.5% |
| Percentage of answers incorrect | 20.83% | 22% | 38.5% |

*more students were present when the story was told, but many had heard the story previously.

DISCUSSION

Only one class showed better retention of information using a puppet. Class C heard Soap, Soap with a hand puppet of the main character. This class, C, had the lowest score for the story, The Maco Light, which they heard without any props at all.

The Maco Light did not score high when using the puppet either. The highest score for this story was reached when a flannel board and figures were used. (The highest scores were received from Class A.) Perhaps the story was better understood with visual aids that described the area. Class B heard The Maco Light with a puppet. The class seemed fascinated with the puppet. The question then arises as to how much of the story they heard while watching the puppet.

The Maco Light story had the lowest scores for classes B and C. The story was told with a puppet in Class B and without props in Class C. Class A heard the story with flannel board figures and the score was much higher. The score was out of line with other scores on this story, but still within the range of the other scores for percentage correct by the class.

One suggestion from the literature on puppet theater for public libraries suggests that students become familiar with the puppets before the story begins. The time limits placed on the storyteller did not allow for this activity. Each teacher had allotted only between 25-30 minutes for both the story telling and answering the questions. More time from an already busy schedule was not possible to find.

If repeated, this study should include more subjects. First, a class needs to test the methods and questionnaires. Once the stories and questionnaires are established, at least three times the number of students used for each section of the study should be included in

each group; A, B, and C instead of just one class in each section to give a better representation of students.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings did not support the use of a puppet as the most effective tool for helping with retention of information, when used in a storytelling setting. Only one class, C, showed this style of story telling as having the highest percentage of correct answers (for their class only). This conclusion does not suggest that puppetry cannot be used as percentages for correct answers were above 50 percent.

Two stories, Soap, Soap and The Maco Light had the highest correct answer percentages for the story session told with the flannel board. For Possum, Turtle and the Wolves, the story told without a prop garnered the highest score. Using the flannel board was a novelty for some of the children. They had never seen one before, and asked the storyteller after the story where the figures came from and how they managed to stay on the board. Placing figures on a flannel board allows the story to unfold in front of the audience as it is told. The audience hears the words and sees a picture actively created (as opposed to picture already drawn in a book). The novelty of the device perhaps contributed to the higher return.

When telling a story without props the story person can exaggerate movements and voice inflection. Using one puppet as the narrator makes it harder to exaggerate some movements. The exaggeration in storytelling might contribute to the vividness with which a child can visualize the setting and thus stimulate retention. It would be nice to think that children today still have an active imagination and do not need their visualization done for them.

Why did the stories told with the puppet not have a higher percentage of answers correct? Nancy Renfro suggests in A Puppet Corner in Every Library that the children

need the “opportunity to hold the puppets during the story, it is important for them to do so [then or] afterwards. Intimate contact with a puppet, especially after empathizing with it in a drama, further heightens the overall impression upon a child” (p.20). The children in this study were introduced to the puppet, but time did not permit their handling any of them. Prudence Taylor also mentions the public library allowing the children access to the puppets used in their plays (“Puppets-Perennial Favorites”). It is recommend that the children have a hands on familiarity with the puppets used for story telling so they can identify more closely with them and thus listen more carefully, as if a friend is telling the story.

A comparison with Lonard’s experimental study shows a similar finding in the reading habits of fourth graders. Ms. Lonard states that her study “revealed no significant effect of the experimental treatments (i.e., oral reading or puppetry) upon the subjects’ reading interests, time spent in reading, number of books read, or preference for type of reading material”

Puppets may be valuable for certain venues in education such as allowing children to create the puppets and to use them in their own ways. Using one puppet as a narrator will take practice for any story teller. Students watching the puppet narrate a story need to be familiar with the “narrator” (the puppet) and the rest of the puppets in the library from having used them in the library in hands on situations.

Although the puppets did not show the highest scores for story retention, they are still a valuable tool in education. They can be used to help explain abstract concepts in a visual way. They are also useful to help students express themselves since the puppet can be an intermediary for a child and remove the child one step emotionally from the situation. Future studies on the value of puppets in education will perhaps reveal new ways to use them to help children learn.

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APPENDIX

Sample form passed out to all fourth grade teachers at the school.

Hi,

My name is Martie Mullenbach, perhaps you have seen me in the media center working with Reta, Jennifer, and Carol-Lee. I am a MLS student at UNC, and working here as part of my field experience.



As one of my studies I would like to set up some times with you to tell your fourth graders three North Carolina tales. The stories will take approximately a half hour each. They will be told one week a part.

This is part of the study for my master's paper to see if using puppets will help increase attention span and information retention.

Each story is a North Carolina tale, to fit in with your units on North Carolina. Each tale will be told in a different manner. One with a puppet, one with a flannel board, and one just as a story teller.

I can come to the class room, or the stories can be told in the media center, your choice. I will also arrange my schedule to fit yours.

Please let me know soon if this is something you would like to participate in, and what times are good for you. You can just return this to the media center or put it in the media center box.

Thanks,
Martie

_____yes, I would like to have you tell the tales.

_____ day at _____time, starting the week of

is a good match for me.

_____no, sorry, not interested.

Sample questionnaire for the story Soap, Soap, Don't Forget The Soap!

Poor Plug,

Before his memory got better, he met several people on the way to town.

Help him remember which order he met them in, by putting the number by their names.

(1 by the first person he met, a 2 by the second, and so on till they all have a number.)

The People:

When he met them:

Old lady

Farmer with a tree on his truck

Mayor's wife

Bald man

Boy in the brambles

Where did Plug live? Circle the right one

At the sea shore

In Raleigh

In the mountains

Who always believed he could remember the soap? _____

What did the boy in the brambles break on Plug's hat? _____

Sample questionnaire for the story Possum, Turtle, and the Wolves
Last weeks story:

1. Who had a picnic with the turtle? _____

Circle one:

2. They ate lots and lots of:

Persimmons

Apples

Oranges

Kiwis

3. Turtle used wolf's ears for:

Slippers

Spoon

Shovel

4. What things did the wolves threaten to do to turtle?

A. _____

B. _____

5. How did turtle's shell get hurt? _____

6. Turtle's shell changed and became (circle one)

Smooth

Patterned

A different color

7. This is a story first told by the _____ tribe (circle one)

Cherokee

Seminole

Iroquois

Sample questionnaire for the story The Maco Light
The Maco Light

Circle one:

1. During the Civil War, our hero was able to:

- A. Keep the train running
- B. Work on the underground railroad
- C. Blow up the railroad

2. After the Civil War our hero became:

- A. Train engineer
- B. Conductor
- C. Station master

True or False: (circle T or F)

- 1. T. F. The train couldn't move before our hero said it could.
- 2. T. F. The engine came loose from the rest of the train.
- 3. T. F. They still see the light at the Maco station.
- 4. T. F. The train tracks are still there.
- 5. T. F. The Maco station had to change their lights to red and green.
- 6. T. F. The accident happened in a swamp

Fill in the blanks

- 1. People say the light in the swamp is our hero and he is either trying to _____.
- 2. This story is from the North Carolina _____. (Where geographically?)

Puppet use in classrooms in schools K-12 has increased in conjunction with whole language literature and integrated cross curriculum lessons. This study will examine puppetry use in the library media center as a teaching tool. Three stories are needed that can be told easily in three different ways. A heard the second story with a puppet as the narrator, B heard the same story without any props and C listened to the story with a flannel board for a prop. For the third story A listened to and had a flannel board as an aid, B listened to the story told by a puppet and C had no special prop for the story. The stories were all told in the classroom at the same time of day (10:30 A.M.), one week apart. By using the puppet regularly for specific activities such as "Reading time" or "Goodbye time", you can move from one activity to the next seamlessly, keeping your students motivated and engaged. 2) Creating affective conditions. One of the pre-conditions for learning is for children to feel comfortable, secure, and in a nurturing environment. One of the most effective and involving activities for children is acting out stories or situations. Of course the children could be the actors themselves, but if they use puppets, it liberates them and gives them greater creative licence. Some ways you could use the puppet as a reward include: holding the puppet for the rest of the class. leading the class in a song as "the puppet". saying "Goodbye" to everyone as "the puppet".