

# **Puppetry, a powerful tool for a maker-space**

Art expresses the soul of human civilisation as does making. In today's ever-evolving environment it is important for the field of art and making education to continue defining and redefining its versatility and malleability in the education of children. As per Marshall (2014) art integration should be framed as a trans-disciplinary paradigm which meets the current needs of education. In this article I discuss how a form of art 'puppetry' acts as an integrated tool for exploratory making. The hybrid nature of puppetry provides many opportunities for merging of various disciplines, learning styles, and pedagogies to create a comprehensive learning experiences. In addition, puppetry is a natural bridge to play, imagination, experimentation, storytelling, and collaboration.

## **Found-Object Puppetry**

The basic idea of found-object puppetry is to use the everyday surrounding objects as puppets and build a story around them. Why do we build an environment of found-object puppetry? Let us explore the same by looking at the below examples in primary and upper primary classroom.

One of the role of the puppeteer is to listen to and work with the materiality of things. Objects inform us, which involves more than merely hearing the imaginary voices of things. Listening to a thing involves holding it and turning it this way and that—an exploration of its unique materiality. This is an important link as exploring with materiality of things is also an important role of a maker space.

The upper primary school learners started with exploring card-board as material for making puppets. But, as they were making puppets for Savitribai Phule (an Indian revolutionary) puppet show, just making puppets with card-board was not that exciting. It was bringing monotony and lack of engagement among learners. Also, the availability of card-board was restricted to urban areas. The facilitator put forward the question 'is there any objects around us which can help in making puppets differently'? This was the beginning of exploration with material. The puppeteer is particularly experienced of peculiar properties of each material as to what it is "saying". The learners started to explore with material such as paper, bamboo, corn-leaves, sticks, rice husk as a material to make puppets and also

some objects which was available in the surroundings like broom, bucket, tyres, spoons, shoes, clothes, and etc.

Gosden (2005) argues in his essay, What do objects want? The kinds of questions the puppeteer might ask of material might include: “What does it want?” “Which way does it want to go?” “What story does it want to tell?”

The learners explored materiality of paper (paper from their old notebooks, textbooks, newspapers, etc). They tried to crumple, wet, soak, dry, make some marks, changing the texture of paper and in this exploration they reached a point where they discovered the process of making paper-mache puppets. While they were making puppets for Savitribai Phule show using this technique, they found out that there is an issue with respect to weight and density of the puppet so they mixed paper-pulp with husk and mud from the pond to make it more heavier to bring stability into the puppet. The size, shape, texture, weight, age and density of matter can dictate the direction and flow of movement that gives each character life on stage. In this unit, the learners were given perspective about how paper can also be animated, the facilitators showed the work of some artists of the Little Angel Theatre group.

In another example with grade 5 students, while exploring a theme around re-purposing, the learners were asked to bring one object which they considered has the potential of being re-purposed. They were given the task that they have to transform their objects into a person and thinking about them metaphorically. So they had to think about the personality, the occupation, the role and the family and present it while exploring the materiality of the object. In this the learners used old shoes, pliers, suitcases, bottles, and hasia and they presented a puppet show on the life story of the object giving it a puppet character. The learners also identified the designed injustices in the objects, eg. sandals or chappals of all females had heels so the chappal metaphorically brought up the discomfort and the pain when females had to walk for long time (usual in their context). This also initiated the discussion on equality and discrimination.

This experience had a huge impact on the learners and on Teachers Day the learners presented a puppet show on the story of ‘Mr Phunsuk Lal ki Bagia’ where they made Phunsuk Lal using shoes and wool. There was a mouse in the show which was made by scissors and hasia.

The materiality offers scope to explore the chemical composition as an inquiry as well as metaphorical thinking through puppets give scope for talking about the designed injustices of objects and their politics. It not only serves as a tool for building imagination and creativity but also serve in building decision-making competencies like which object to use, how to use and so on. The language development of connecting with the outer world, building on words and vocabulary is definitely nurtured.

Through such experiences, the puppeteer can create a puppet character that is a metaphor for human experience. The performer also steps into a new reality, looks around, explores what this new reality looks like, moves on and makes connections on the way which are extremely creative and imaginative. The learners move into one more 'micro-world' and form a 'micro-identity' for a while when they are into the found object puppetry. This enhances the power of thinking both for primary and upper primary learners.

Two things which came out that, after the integration of art and making through found object that both involve close observation and to understand the variables, it is important to perform iterations. One needs to tweak a particular thing to understand what has been the change, the same applies to making as well as in art. Also, this particular art-form provides more opportunities for facilitators to do 'explorations' that provide the right stimulus.