

Abstract

Title: The puppet's communicative potential as a mediating tool in pre-school

Language: Swedish with a summary in English

Keywords: the puppet as a tool, activity, motive, interaction, dialog, subjectivisation, mediation and communicative acts

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A puppet as a tool is a material object, an artefact in which different game-related procedures are incorporated, but not acts or goals involving the use of the puppet. By means of external properties such as appearance, movement and speech, the puppet's actions can give rise to and evoke emotions, thoughts and associations in the spectators. When the puppet's external properties affect the spectators' emotional life, the puppet is ascribed personal properties that can have different meanings in the context. It is first in the relation with a person that the puppet's communicative potential can emerge and it is through communication that the puppet's existence can be acknowledged and developed. Viewed from a historical perspective, the puppet's communicative properties have been utilised for different purposes and in different activities such as the theatre, education, therapy and politics.

In this study, the focus is not on the puppet as a theatre puppet but as a puppet in the everyday life of pre-school. In the empirical section of the thesis, the puppet functions as a starting point for children's interaction, narratives and communication. The research interest is directed towards the content of communicative processes where the puppet is present between the teacher and the children, towards children's ways of expressing the meaning of the puppet as a tool and towards the motives that are generated in the interaction between the puppet and children in different activities. The overall aim of the thesis is to generate knowledge of the puppet's relational, linguistic and action-related potential as a mediating tool for children's communication and learning in pre-school. In what way can the puppet develop as a subject and a driving force in the interaction with children? What is the significance of using the puppet as a mediating tool in pre-school? What communicative processes can be developed between the teacher, the puppet and the children?

Children's communication with the puppet in the everyday life of pre-school is studied here as a part of pre-school's social and cultural practices. The starting

point of the study is an ethnographical research approach, which means that the researcher lives close to the reality studied and follows social processes and relations in different social and cultural contexts. By participating myself in the study, based on the twin roles of teacher and researcher, my intention was to discover, verbalise and generate new knowledge about the puppet as a tool. The study was conducted in a group of children during autumn 2004 and spring 2005. As I chose to be part of the pre-school's context and to shoulder twin roles, the time aspect, the presence aspect and the continuity aspect stood out as fundamental prerequisites of the implementation of the study. The theoretical framework consists of a sociocultural perspective and an activity theory perspective. While the use of tools from a sociocultural perspective is regarded as mediation of knowledge and primarily a collective act, the use of tools from an activity theory perspective is regarded as an individual activity process and a subjective act. The use of the puppet in pre-school involves acts that are both collective and individual in the light of the study's theoretical concepts: language and thinking, dialog and meaning, motive and activity, mediation and tool, communication and context and interaction and "the zone of proximal development".

In this thesis, attention is focused on the content that arises in communication when children spontaneously interact *with* the puppet, *about* the puppet and *because of* the puppet, and this also comprises different dimensions of the puppet's presence in the common communication. The results from the study show how the puppet's communicative potential is generated through processes of subjectivisation, mediation and three-party relationships. The puppet's *relational potential* emerges as a result of children's relation to the puppet, developing sentimental value, generating communicative acts based on knowledge-related and emotional motives and overstepping boundaries between actual and imagined worlds. The puppet's *linguistic potential* emerges when the children communicating with the puppet mediate cultural and social experiences, express their conceptions of knowledge and learning and develop indicative, semiotic and rhetorical functions of language. The puppet's *action-related potential* emerges through the development of three-party relationships, which can also be described in terms of "the zone of proximal development" and "mutual assistance". The puppet's action-related potential also emerges in children's play and through collective and creative acts.