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# Pulling Strings: The Effects of Puppetry on the Language and Literacy Development of a Preschool Classroom

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PULLING STRINGS: THE EFFECTS OF PUPPETRY ON THE LANGUAGE AND  
LITERACY DEVELOPMENT OF A PRESCHOOL CLASSROOM

by

Megan E. Rounds

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for a Degree with Honors  
(Communication Sciences and Disorders,  
Child Development and Family Relations)

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## Abstract

This study assessed the effects of implementing a puppet-centered curriculum into the dramatic play area of a university's child study and research preschool. The curriculum included a child-centered, instructional conversation based program in which 12 children discovered the puppets through their own creativity and experimentation. These children were observed three times, once each in October, November, and December. Between the observations, children viewed puppet shows performed by their classroom teachers and visited a theater on campus to view a puppet show performed by students from the School of Performing Arts. Observations were assessed using the *Preschool through Third Grade Omnibus Guidelines*, with a focus on the overall development and progression of the average language and literacy skills of the classroom. The analysis shows that children progressed from performing at Preschool-3 levels to performing at Preschool-4 levels and beyond in just three months. This result shows the importance of a dramatic play area as well as the benefits of using puppets to encourage a child's vocabulary and story-telling abilities.

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Many methods of supporting the early language and literacy development of preschool-aged children exist. Most commonly, children are read to and parents and caregivers are encouraged to use language with everyday activities. The first six years are the most important phase of a child's development, during which a child will use play to learn (Oksaar, 1983). Between toddlerhood, when children are expanding their verb vocabulary, and the preschool years when children are learning all about spatial terms, pronouns, and conjunctions, the early years of language development are incredibly important (Shulman & Capone, 2010).

When a child enters preschool, generally between the ages of three and four, they are greeted with numerous opportunities to grow and enhance their knowledge. Many preschools have a curriculum that is developed to encourage natural childhood curiosity and learning through play. Preschool classrooms are typically composed of a number of activity areas, most commonly including the block area, a writing table, an art easel, water or sensory play table, a library, and a dramatic play area. The focus of this study is on the dramatic play area, particularly on the effects of puppetry on language development.

Dramatic play uses children's imagination to create a different world or practice skills they see in their own world, allowing children to use language they may not normally hear or use, all while strengthening their vocabulary and building their lexicon. Dramatic play is also used to "help resolve conflicts, identify and understand emotions, and develop sources of information for extending social skills", for example, a young child may pretend to be a chef while another child orders at a "restaurant" using appropriate restaurant terms. (Howell & Corbey-Scullen, 1997, p. 84). As children develop these skills, they are learning to empathize with their peers and can take on new roles and characters. Language aids a child in socialization,

as they are able to interact with their peers and teachers in a way that allows them to express opinions and create strong bonds through the use of verbal and nonverbal communication.

Literacy is developed in the dramatic play area through the use of props that involve writing and reading (a grocery list, a menu, a receipt) as well as through writing scripts. While young preschoolers still have emergent writing and may use unconventional symbols to convey meaning on paper, they are capable of dictating to a teacher so that the script may be performed later to the entire class. Reading and writing expose a child to a new world of vocabulary that they can use in conversations with peers, thus furthering their language development.

Occasionally included in the dramatic play area are puppets. Hand puppets may be used to strengthen children's gross motor skills as they use their arms and bodies to animate the puppets, and fine motor skills to move the puppet's mouth and limbs (Pond, Gordon, Kohler, Snell, Stoltz, 2013). Hand puppets are familiar to many children from attending puppet shows or seeing them on television and come in a variety of types, characters, and sizes.

While a number of studies exist illustrating the benefits of dramatic play in early childhood classes, few exist to study specifically how puppetry may be used to encourage early language and literacy development. Pond et al. (2013) discuss how puppets can embrace a young child's attention better than a familiar teacher can, as a puppet is out of the ordinary to the child. Teachers can encourage children to use puppets to act out a story as it is being read or as the children revisit the book. Children are given the freedom to change the story as they wish, and work together to create their own literary masterpiece. Children that are more introverted are able to interact through their puppets with other children and their teachers and the puppets may ease the child into becoming more interactive with their peers (Pond et al., 2013).

When designing curriculum, it is important to understand the environment of the classroom so that the activities are developmentally appropriate (Bahmaee, Saadatmand, and Yarmohammadian, 2015). The environment of the Katherine Miles Durst Child Development Learning Center (CDLC) is child-centered and inclusive to all children. The education of the children relies on Instructional Conversations between the students and teachers as well as a strong child-teacher relationship.

### **The Philosophy of the Preschool Classroom**

In order to study the effects of puppetry on the language and literacy development of a preschool classroom, one must first understand the philosophies that are used in the CDLC. These philosophies are vital in designing and implementing a classroom curriculum. The curriculum needs to be flexible enough to be led by the children and be inclusive to all of the children's abilities. In designing this curriculum, the researcher attended weekly planning meetings with all head and assistant teachers to create an activity that was cohesive with the rest of the classroom. It is important to consider the following philosophies, including the child-centered curriculum, inclusion in the classroom, Instructional Conversations, and warm child-teacher relationships when creating and implementing a lesson plan in the CDLC classroom due to the fact that all of these factors will affect how children perceive the lesson and what they will learn from it. These philosophies all influence children's language and literacy development, as they are exposed to new vocabulary words and a rich world of literature.



### *The Philosophy of a Child-Centered Curriculum*

Child-centered curriculum means that educational experiences are designed based on the belief that children should have control over the subjects being studied in the classroom (Lerikkanen et al., 2016; Marcon, 2002; Mashburn et al., 2008). In these classrooms, the teaching practice used is tailored for each individual student, which allows for the greatest academic growth possible (Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg, Pianta, & Howes, 2002; Lerikkanen et al., 2016; Marcon, 2002; Mashburn et al., 2008). When compared to teacher-directed classrooms, where there is a focus on the retention of knowledge and a lack of focus on the development of social skills or peer learning, children that were in child-centered classrooms performed at a higher level in several domains (Burchinal et al., 2002; Lerikkanen et al., 2016; Marcon, 2002; Mashburn et al., 2008).

The debate on the positives and negatives of teacher-directed preschool classrooms began in the early 1980's, when researchers and educators started to voice their concerns surrounding the style of a formal classroom for young learners (Marcon, 2002). In her original quasi-experimental study, Marcon (1999) concluded that children in child-directed classrooms outperformed their peers that were in academic-focused (teacher-directed) classrooms or in classrooms that blended the two styles. In a follow-up study, Marcon (2002) revisited the children from those classrooms, now in grades three and four. At the end of the third grade, teachers of these children reported that the behavior of children that attended child-centered programs was better than that of their peers who had attended teacher-directed preschools. Children from child-centered preschool classrooms had a higher average "Citizenship" grade (this reflects their social skills in the classroom) (Marcon, 2002). Although the children from all three types of classrooms ranked similarly in math, reading, writing, and other core courses it is

important to note that people also need a good sense of social skills to thrive in their adult lives. This leads to the conclusion that children from child-centered classrooms perform better overall through the fourth grade.

In the CDLC, child-directed lessons are the primary method of teaching. The majority of the students' time spent at school is free choice play, in which the teachers float between the areas of the classroom and observe how the children interact with the educational materials provided. These materials are chosen during the teachers' planning times. To plan appropriate educational opportunities, teachers use current educational research, knowledge of the children's interests and knowledge of the children's abilities.

#### *Inclusion in the Preschool Classroom*

Perhaps the most important aspect of CDLC classroom is its policy regarding children with special needs. Inclusion is the philosophy of welcoming all children and families to the classroom regardless of factors such as race, religion, culture, disabilities, and beliefs (Green, Terry, and Gallagher, 2014). Inclusion benefits children that are typically developing as well as children with disabilities (Green et al., 2014). Inclusion allows for a sense of community and acceptance to develop between children. Through inclusion, children are invited to learn from their peers and practice important life skills such as conflict resolution and expression of opinions (Ogelman and Seçer, 2012).

Green et al.'s 2014 study of 77 children that have Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and 77 typically developing peers sought to compare the progress that children with disabilities make in oral vocabulary, phonological awareness, the alphabet, and print knowledge during preschool with their typically developing peers, as well as identify if the achievement gap

between these two groups of children in the categories narrowed over the course of the preschool year. The researchers found that children with disabilities had significant success in all areas in ways that were similar to their peers (Green et al., 2014). From this study, we can see that all children can learn in inclusive classrooms. Children from this study most often learned simply by being a member of a diverse and accepting classroom.

Inclusive classrooms do not just benefit children with disabilities. In a study of Turkish elementary school students, researchers found that children that were typically developing had signs of less aggressive behavior when in an inclusive classroom (Ogelman and Secer, 2012). These children also had better social behaviors and a stronger sense of community. This stems from the idea that in an inclusive classroom, every child is treated with the same level of respect by the teachers and in turn, the children respect each other. They also may observe the interactions that the teachers have with the children with disabilities and learn new ways to deal with their aggressive behaviors.

Teachers can also learn from an inclusive classroom. Of 1,313 preschool classrooms surveyed in North Carolina, teachers of inclusive classrooms had a higher quality of teaching and more appropriate interactions with their students than non-inclusive classroom teachers (Hestenes, Cassidy, Shim, and Hegde, 2008). Inclusive classrooms had a higher level of overall quality. This can once again be traced back to the sense of community that is fostered in inclusive classrooms. Hestenes et al. (2008) also includes that teachers of inclusive classrooms on average have a higher level of education than their non-inclusive peers.

The CDLC is an inclusive classroom which welcomes all children regardless of socioeconomic status, religion, race, disabilities, or level of development. Each child, family member, and teacher in the classroom's community deserves and receives the same amount of

respect. Expectations are high for all children, individually based on their skills and opportunities for growth, to allow children to take risks and achieve both personal and teacher-set goals and get the most out of the classroom experience as possible. In the CDLC classroom, the children are taught a process of conflict resolution, which encourages them to use their language skills to work out disagreements with their peers and find mutual solutions.

### *Instructional Conversations*

The Instructional Conversation technique (IC) uses small group discussions to combine previously known knowledge with new information to create a stronger understanding of a concept (Goh, Yamauchi, and Ratliffe, 2012). One example of the use of IC in the CDLC classroom is occurs during morning circle. Teachers introduce a new activity and explain how the children can perform that activity, often while visually demonstrating how to the children. Instructional Conversation is used in the classroom alongside modeling to teach concepts such as conflict resolution; it also can encourage language development by adding rich new vocabulary into a child's lexicon (Goh et al., 2012).

Although the IC technique is typically conducted in classes for children in kindergarten and older, one study of 12 teachers in a university child care center showed there was a shared belief amongst educators that IC can encourage social and cognitive development and a sense of self-reliance in preschool aged children (Goh et al., 2012). These classroom teachers also believed that IC allows for a building of important child-teacher relationships that benefit early childhood education because teachers were able to learn more about the students' backgrounds and family life which led to a better sense of where the children were at a developmental level (Goh et al., 2012). The children in Goh et al.'s study (2012) were between the ages of 2 to 5, an

age that does not typically experience IC. By using a combination of verbal and nonverbal communication, teachers were able to lead children in individualized lessons based on the child's interests and level of ability (Goh et al., 2012). The study concluded that IC is a two-way form of communication that teachers can use to provide scaffolding for correct language and gestures in preschool children.

In the CDLC classroom teachers ask the children open-ended questions to grasp the children's understanding of a topic. Instructional Conversation is used at all times of the day in the CDLC classroom. During transition times such as drop-off and pick-up, teachers use it to grasp an understanding of how the child is feeling that day and direct the child to an appropriate activity depending on energy levels. During group times, teachers use it as they read books, ask questions of the children, and introduce new activities. It is particularly useful during free-choice time to gather information on the children's interest levels. During this study, the researcher and classroom teachers will work together to model correct use of puppets and ask open-ended questions regarding the puppets. As a researcher, I am particularly interested in how the IC technique is used in the preschool setting.

### *Child-Teacher Relationships*

Every person can look back and tell you who their favorite teacher was and who their most ineffective teachers were. The teachers of the CDLC are taught to build strong, trusting relationships with each child. Children have their own stories to tell and each one has their own unique family history. By giving each child the respect and care they deserve, need, and desire, teachers are able to build strong child-teacher relationship.

In their 2008 study, Mashburn et al. observed the child-teacher interactions in preschool classrooms. These observations included the amount of scaffolding provided in an instructional way as well as the teacher's response to a child's needs and cues (Mashburn et al., 2008). Based on the quality of the child-teacher relationships, there was a correlation between the emotional interactions and a child's development of social competence (Mashburn et al., 2008). These child-teacher interactions also result in a higher level of language abilities during preschool as well as a decrease in the diagnosis of behavior problems. A similar assessment given to children from Spanish-speaking homes also found a positive correlation between child-teacher interactions and their abilities of receptive language, social skills, emergent writing, and letter identification (Mashburn et al., 2008).

A similar study that followed children from preschool to second grade found that a strong child-teacher relationship could impact the academic skills of children considered at-risk due to their family's characteristics, which would include such things as parent education, parenting style, race, and culture (Burchinal et al., 2002). Children whose parents believed in a stricter, authoritative style of child-rearing still had the same chance at a successful academic career as their peers, but through a different pathway. These children were able to learn through a warm relationship with their teacher which may have been built on a higher level of trust than their relationship with their parents. In these studies, a similar theme existed in the findings. Children from child-centered classrooms were more likely to have higher social-skills than their peers from classrooms that used other teaching methods (Burchinal et al., 2002; Mashburn et al., 2008).

The philosophy of the CDLC is for teachers to respect an individual child's opinions, likes, dislikes and in return children learn that they can trust their teachers and through this trust

a warm and strong relationship is built. The teachers in the classroom model a respect for each child that enters into their classroom community, which children will observe and in turn, use with their peers. It is important to consider the child-teacher relationship when creating a curriculum, as the level of trust and respect between both parties will affect the effectiveness of that lesson. A warm child-teacher relationship also builds on the language exchanged between the two parties. Teachers can use moments when they are speaking with an individual child while building this relationship to use new vocabulary and reinforce important pragmatic and syntactic rules.

### **Language and Literature Development in the Preschool Setting**

In order to study the effects puppetry has on language development, it is important to understand what is typically considered “normal” language development.<sup>1</sup> In addition to verbal communication, speech is supplemented by non-linguistic gestures, gaze, facial expressions, tonal and voice quality (Goh et al., 2012). Language and literacy development occur throughout the entire preschool day, in all areas of the classroom, and the classroom philosophy determines how language development can be supported and encouraged. Children are exposed to vocabulary, are read books, asked to tell stories, and communicate with their peers and teachers. Language development is typically described by Brown's Stages of Language Acquisition (Hulit, Fahey, and Howard, 2015). The first two stages occur prior to a child's enrollment in preschool, between birth and 2 ½ years (birth-31 months). Stages 3-5 coincide with the time a child may spend in preschool between ages of 2 ½ to 4 (Hulit et al., 2015).

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<sup>1</sup> It is also important to note that development occurs on a scale. As such, no two children are exactly alike in their language development and although one child may develop a skill later than another, the child may not be considered “at-risk” in any way.

By the beginning of preschool, ages 2 ½ to 3 years of age (31-34 months), children in Brown's Stage III speak in sentences of a mean length of utterance (MLU) of 2.5 – 3.0 words (Hulit et al., 2015). These children are consistently using verbs such as “can” and “will”, as well as pronouns such as “you”, “your”, “he”, “she”, “their”, “those”, “we”, “this”, and “that” (Hulit et al., 2015). During conversations, a topic may stay relevant for 2-3 turns, then change to a different subject. One primary method of keeping a conversation on topic for this age group is to repeat back what the child has just said (Hulit et al., 2015). Children are also experimenting with correcting their words or sentences, such as repairing “he runned away” to be “he ran away” (Hulit et al., 2015). Early narratives begin to appear during this stage as well, and children may be able to tell very short stories (1-2 utterances) (Hulit et al., 2015).

In Brown's Stage IV, which is typically between 3 years to 3 ½ years (35-40 months), the MLU has expanded to be 3.0 – 3.75 words (Hulit et al., 2015). Children are able to stay on a single topic for longer and can sequence ideas in simple stories. Children are also in the early stages of literacy acquisition and are able to reference familiar print (Hulit et al., 2015).

Brown's Stage V brings an MLU of 3.75 to 4.5 words. Children that are between the ages of 3 ½ to 4 years of age (41-46 months) are in Stage V and have a much more sophisticated grasp of language (Hulit et al., 2015). Conversations become much longer and children can stay on topic for several turns. Children are also learning phonological awareness, which is an important step in emergent writing and literacy. Phonological awareness allows children to understand the sounds of a word, meaning they can manipulate these sounds, such as rhyming “bat” with “cat” or changing the ending sound in “feed” to “feet” (Hulit et al., 2015).

In a 1996 study, Notari-Syverson, O'Connor, & Vadasy studied the gains of children with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. After one year and several structured activities, these



children showed significant gains in print awareness and letter identification (Notari-Syverson et al., 1996). One activity included was asking children to retell past events or retell a story of a book that had just been read. This activity not only has children think critically about the words that they have listened to, but asks them to describe the pictures in the book. Activities such as this one show the ways in which language and literacy development complement each other.

### **Dramatic Play in the Preschool Classroom**

Present in many preschool classrooms is the dramatic play area, in which children can take on roles which reflect their interests. In the CDLC preschool, the dramatic play area is changed depending on the children's interest levels, this could be anywhere between two weeks, or last more than a month. As the classroom has a child-centered philosophy, the dramatic play area evolves with the children's interest levels. If the children appear uninterested with the area, teachers work to design a new theme for the area. Examples of themes that occurred during the study were a farmer's market, a house, and a post office.

In the CDLC the dramatic play area always includes clothes for the children to put on, a table, pretend food, dishes, and props that change based on theme. For each theme, teachers design literacy and writing props for the area. These props could be coupons, advertisements, and other items that children would see when visiting that location in real life. In her 1999 study, Johnson viewed the effects that literacy props and field trips have on the dramatic play area in a preschool classroom. Children were introduced to the themed dramatic play area and the next day taken on a field trip to a related location (in this instance, a dentist's office and a flower shop). She found that despite her small sample size, the use of the literacy props increased after the field trip to the location, in which children saw the literacy props being used (Johnson, 1999).

Even children that cannot read show an interest in the literacy props in the CDLC classroom. Children are curious to know what the props say and then use them for their intended purposes. The dramatic play area allows for exposure to props and pretend play that children may not otherwise have the opportunity to do.

Walker's 1999 study discovered that children in the dramatic play area used story-telling to coordinate actions during dramatic play. This is similar to Logue and Detour's (2011) study that reported on the ways children use scripting during playtime. In this study, the preschoolers had a "script" that was used on multiple days. This script involved similar actions, statements used, and sequence of events. Walker's study (1999) observed children using events familiar to their lives during dramatic play. Children use dramatic play in both studies to connect to their peers. In both Walker's (1999) and Logue and Detour's (2011) studies, the children were able to understand each other's goals for the play and worked together to reach those goals.

In addition to spoken language and literacy, the dramatic play area also fosters emergent writing skills (Ihmeidah, 2014). A study of preschool children in the country of Jordan was conducted to illustrate the importance of both a child-centered classroom and the inclusion of a dramatic play area in the preschool classroom. The actions of the children in the group with a writing focus were not observed before the implementation of this curriculum. Instead, the emergent writing skills were dependent on the inclusion of the writing activities. The study found that children whose dramatic play areas had writing activities had higher indicators of emergent writing than the children whose dramatic play areas did not have a writing component (Ihmeidah, 2014).

### *Puppets in the Dramatic Play Area*

In the average preschool classroom, children are exposed to a variety of materials and tools to support and enhance their learning. Tools may be switched out or modified to increase the children's interest levels or keep up with the children's development. Along with the usual dress-up clothes and props in the dramatic play area, a puppet theater may be present. Despite its prevalence in early childhood education classrooms, few studies have been conducted on the importance of puppetry in the dramatic play area. Children can give puppets unique background stories and personalities depending on how they want them to fit their play (Turner, 2003). Turner describes that children are able to manipulate the puppets physically; they are in control of the puppets' actions and decide what they want them to do and say; this can in turn help children communicate with adults (Turner, 2003).

Many puppets designed for use in the early childhood classroom consist of soft felt fabric of bright colors and foam, and display cheerful expressions. These characteristics draw the child in and cause the puppet to appear friendly. Like stuffed animals, children may be drawn to the puppets as a friends (Salmon & Sainato, 2005). Anecdotal evidence has shown the positive effect puppets have on a young child's learning during circle and transition times in the classroom. Puppets provide an opportunity for dramatic play to facilitate expressive language, emotional expression, and social development.

Children, like actors, learn through experimentation. If an action or performance does not go smoothly, children can try again in a different way until their actions are successful. When in the dramatic play area, children have the ability to practice this experimentation on their own and with their peers. As Milda Bredikyte (2000) described, when children attend theatrical performances, they can see the results of this experimentation first hand. It is important to

provide an atmosphere in the early childhood classroom to allow children to attempt what they have just watched in the performance (Bredikyte, 2000). It is also important, she explained, to allow children to engage in the show by touching the puppets and props, asking questions, and expressing their opinions to provide the children with a way to discuss what they have viewed.

In another study, university students visited a classroom of children ages 2-7 years four times to perform a 55-minute-long puppet show. A week later, the children were recorded performing the same puppet show. The children were involved in the selection of the show, a discussion of artistic creativity that would be required, selection of staging, music and songs, and the rehearsal process. When comparing the two performances to one another, the researchers discovered that the children's performance was highly similar to the one they had viewed the week prior. The children's performance was a spontaneous improvisation, meaning it was not scripted, but followed a natural course to a shared goal, in this case, performing a similar plot. Instead of narrating using words as the researchers did, the children showed actions and relied on visual cues to tell the story and added dialogue when necessary.

It was also found that children did not perform for the audience as much as they did for themselves, getting highly involved in the show and using it as a form of play, not performance (Bredikyte, 2000). These findings need to be kept in mind when working on a creative project with children. Although the children in the CDLC study will not perform a puppet show for a formal audience, they will engage in puppet shows with peers and their teachers and learn through the experimentation of their performances.

## **Research Question**

There is a lack of direct evidence showing the effects that puppetry in the classroom has on a child's language and literacy development during the early preschool years. Due to the existing evidence that dramatic play is an important part of a preschool classroom, individual aspects of dramatic play should be assessed in order to examine their successes and limitations in aiding a child's early language and literacy development.

The following study seeks to illustrate these positive effects in one aspect of the dramatic play area, puppets. The results will aid in educating professionals (educators, directors of early childhood programs, early intervention professionals) on the importance of implementing puppetry into their dramatic play areas. The research question is: to what extent can the use of puppetry in a preschool classroom facilitate early language and literacy development?

## **Methods**

### *Participants*

The 14 children are between the ages of 33 and 48 months old. The children are enrolled in the morning section of the Tuesday/Thursday preschool class at the Katherine M. Durst Child Development Learning Center. The number of children is based on the enrollment numbers of the classroom, and includes all of the children.

As the study involves young children, their parents have been provided with a letter and asked to sign a consent form prior to the beginning of the study, informing them of the opportunities and risks of participating in the study. The CDLC is an observation-based classroom, meaning that there is an observation booth with a two-way mirror in the classroom.

Parents are free to observe their children through this window, as well as visit with the children in the classroom. Parents are also invited to attend the field trip to the puppet show in the theater.

### *Classroom Structure*

The physical structure and schedule of the research preschool is fluid yet follows a general pattern. Upon entering the classroom, children are asked to wash their hands and, dependent on the weather, either engage in play outside or inside. On outside days, a puppet theatre and a basket of puppets are provided. Inside, children are free to use the dramatic play area during choice times and various types of puppets were present throughout the time of the study.

The physical structure of the preschool has an open floor plan, allowing the children and teachers to move smoothly from one area to another. Some activities in the CDLC are a block area, a math shelf, a writing table, a play-doh table, an art easel and art projects, a sensory table, a reading area, and finally, a dramatic play area. The classroom is equipped with audio and visual recording as well as an observation booth. Over the course of the study, the dramatic play area as well as the art area and sensory table are changed periodically to keep the children interested and entertained.

Children begin to arrive at 9 A.M. each morning. On days when the children begin outside, parents are asked to assist their child(ren) in hand washing before leading them to the fenced-in play yard. Here children can play on a large climber or participate in several other gross motor activities available. Around 9:30-9:45 children are led inside by teachers and wash their hands a second time and join their peers at Circle Time. Circle Time consists of songs, books, and a question of the day. At the end of the morning circle, children are given their free

play options and are allowed to choose their first area. Free play, lasting between 45 minutes and 1 hour each day, allows children to move between activity areas and interact with the classroom and their peers in a way that they see fit. This is the time of day when the majority of observations take place for this study. After free play, children are invited back to circle time for more songs and book-reading. From there children go to the snack tables and eat a family-style snack then return outside (or to free play on bad-weather days) for pick-up.

### *Procedures*

The observation period begins when the preschool children start at the program in early September. Baseline observations are collected in early October, after the researcher and children have had time to acclimate to one another as well as to the classroom routine. These observations are collected through video recording on a hand held tablet. Children are asked open-ended questions to allow for them to showcase their creativity when using the puppets. As many children are unaccustomed to the puppets, October observations are also taken during other interactions in the dramatic play area.

A second round of observations are performed in November, coinciding with the first in-class puppet show performed by teachers in the program. These observations are taken only when children use puppets in their play. As children become more comfortable with the classroom, some children may have several recorded observations while others had very few observations. At this time, the puppets that are included in the dramatic play area are hand puppets of characters from “The Three Little Pigs” as well as a small finger puppet theater.

The third and final round of observations occur in early December. These observations occur after the children went on their field trip to a theater to view a puppet show of “The Three

Billy Goats Gruff”, performed by students in the on-campus acting organization. After the puppet show, the puppets used are returned to the dramatic play area and children were invited to retell the story in their own way using the puppets and props (a bridge) provided.

### *Measures*

The children's language and literacy skills are assessed using the *Preschool through Third Grade Omnibus Guidelines* (Dichtelmiller, Jablon, Marsden, & Meisels, 2001). This Omnibus provides detailed information on a child's growth in several academic and emotional areas for each year of early education. The Omnibus is organized in a way that allows educators and researchers to compare the progress of children in each area of development on a single page.

For the analysis of the observations, the primary focus is the *Omnibus* section entitled “Language and Literacy”. This section is subdivided into 5 categories; Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, and Research<sup>2</sup>. In each section, there are a number of “performance indicators” (Dichtelmiller et al., 2001, p. vii). Each performance indicator has six grade levels (Preschool-3, Preschool-4, Kindergarten, First Grade, Second Grade, and Third Grade). For each grade level, a description of what is expected for that performance indicator was provided as well as realistic examples in a classroom setting. The Preschool-3 level refers to the youngest age of preschoolers, often matching up with children 3 years of age. Preschool-4 is the next age group of children, typically also known as pre-kindergarten, when children are generally 4 years old. Kindergarten is the next age level, typically for 5 year olds.

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<sup>2</sup> The Research section will not be used for analysis as it is not expected for children between preschool and kindergarten to display the requirements.



## Results

### *Listening*

In the listening section, there are three subcategories: gains meaning through listening, following directions, and showing phonological awareness. The children's receptive language skills are average for their age at the Preschool-3 level during the first observation in October. The children fall at the level of Preschool-3 for the performance indicator "gains meaning through listening" (Dichtelmiller et al., 2001, p. 32). At circle time, during a class read-aloud, the majority of children are observed listening to the book without assistance. Some children need the assistance of teachers, such as sitting on their lap, leaning on them, or standing and moving to be able to focus on the book. Children are also able to imitate what they know about a farmer's market in that themed dramatic play area.

Teacher: What is that?  
Child N: A banana. I have bananas at home.  
T: You have bananas at home?  
N: Yeah I do. Bananas are my favorite.  
T: Are they really?  
N: Yeah they are, really, really, really.  
T: Are bananas fruits or vegetables?  
N: Fruits.  
T: What other fruits do you like?  
N: I like apples and cucumbers.  
T: Apples and cucumbers, yum.

This conversation between a teacher and Child N is observed on October 29<sup>th</sup>. During the course of this conversation, Child N responds appropriately to all of the teacher's questions. This conversation reflects several of the conversations that are held with the children at the dramatic play area during this free choice session. On October 20<sup>th</sup>, a similar conversation is held with a different child.

Teacher: Can I buy this apple?  
Child G: Yeah.

T: Oh no, but I don't have any money.  
G: I got some dollars here.

In this example, Child G responds appropriately by offering the teacher money when they were unable to buy an apple. The child shows understanding that money is needed to purchase an item, as well as giving the teacher the money they need to buy that item.

By mid-November, children's average skill level in this performance indicator has increased to Preschool-4. Children started to show interest in their peers' performances, offering laughter, applause, and suggestions.

Child K: I wanna see.  
Teacher: I wanna watch it.  
K: It's a crab! It's a crab! It's a crab.  
T: It's a crab?  
K: Yeah it's a yellow crab!  
Child A: Nobody can look!  
T: Ok we won't look.  
A: This is only for me.  
A puts puppets on all of their fingers.  
A: Glub glub glub. No looking.  
T: Not yet.  
A: Blub blub blub blub blub blub blub. (Sings a song repeating blub).  
A walks away and K takes the spot behind the theatre.  
A sits in the audience and laughs as K holds different puppets on the stage.  
A: Hey (K) I love the princess one. And the prince one. Do that one.

On this day, A and K take turns performing for one another. They support each other's performances and recalled puppets from a previous conversation. These are indicators that the children had advanced from performing at Preschool-3 to Preschool-4 in just a month.

The children are also showing examples of what it means to be good audience members. Prior to the November observations the children watched a puppet show performance by an assistant teacher and the director of the preschool. During this puppet show children are told that a closed curtain means the show isn't happening at that time and that at the end, the actors bow

and the audience claps. Several children experiment at the finger puppet theater by opening and closing the curtains, peeking between them at their audience before putting their puppets out for a show.

In December, the puppet shows become much more sophisticated. The December observations follow the puppet show performance by the university's acting organization, in which the children are taken to a real theater on campus. During the puppet show field trip, children lean forward in their seats and then ask questions about the puppets after the show ended. Children give appropriate responses about the characters in the puppet show and the actions that occurred. When they return to the classroom the children's puppet shows include characters with voices, actions, and interactions with the other puppets that are being held by both their teachers and their peers.

Child D: Gonna eat you up.

Teacher: You're gonna eat me up? I'll eat you up! Why don't we eat the goat?

Child E: Don't eat the goat!

T: Are you trip trappin' over my bridge?

D: Yeah.

T: Well I'm gonna eat you up!

D: I will eat you up!

E: I ate the goat up.

T: And the goat ate me.

D: Yummy

T: I tasted yummy?

D: Yes

E: No.

D: Num num num.

In this puppet show, Children D and E interact with each other and their teacher. They listen to each other to discover what the goals are for the show (eating the troll). This show turns into a game for the children, taking turns "attacking" the troll puppet and then helping him back up to be attacked again.

Children are also performing at Preschool-3 in October for the next performance indicator for listening, “follows two-step directions” (Dichtelmiller et al., 2001, p. 33). Individually, this ability is dependent on the age of the child, for example, older children need little to no assistance to follow two-step directions, while for the younger children, it took the first few weeks of school to develop this skill. For these children, it may take multiple promptings from the teacher and visual assistance to follow through. Children are able to follow the directions when given both an auditory and visual prompt, for example, during a song they listen to the words and follow the teachers’ movements. In the October 29<sup>th</sup> conversation Child N exhibits an understanding of two-step directions by giving them to the teacher and providing assistance when the teacher does not follow them.

Child N: Now I be him and sit there, and you be here and get the things for, for me.

Teacher: Ok.

N: You stand right here where I'm standing.

The third listening performance indicator, “shows beginning phonological awareness” is not observed in the dramatic play area during October (Dichtelmiller et al., 2001, p. 35).

Children have varied opportunities to practice phonological awareness abilities. Children are however, able to demonstrate it during circle time by participating in familiar songs and nursery rhymes and some are observed singing these songs back to themselves during play time.

In November, children are observed experimenting with changing the sounds in words during their time in the dramatic play area while using the puppets. At the Preschool-4 level, this experimentation focuses on changing the initial phoneme (sound) in a word to a different phoneme.

Child A: Glub glub glub. No looking.

Teacher: Not yet.

A: Blub blub blub blub blub blub blub. (Sings a song repeating blub)

In this case Child A is experimenting changing the initial phoneme, a hard /g/ to a /b/ sound while playing with a fish finger puppet.

By December, more children are observed experimenting with this performance indicator. Child I experiments with changing “trip trap trip” to “clip clap clip” after viewing the performance of *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*. During her own puppet shows, Child I switches back and forth between “trip trap trip” and “clip clap clip”. The children enjoy the goats’ line “trip trap trip trap” and are heard repeating it several times during their puppet shows.

### *Speaking*

The next performance indicator, speaking, has two subcategories: speaking clearly and using expanded vocabulary. At the Preschool-3 level, “children are expected to speak clearly enough to be understood by most listeners” and to “use expanded vocabulary and language for a variety of purposes” (Dichtelmiller et al., 2001, p. 38-40). Children in the CDLC classroom are all at least at the Preschool-3 level at the beginning of the observation period in September.

In October, children have shorter utterances that last on average three to six words long. These utterances lack some parts of speech, but are for the most part easy to understand. For recording purposes, children are often not loud enough to be heard in the microphone, so the researcher repeats the children’s utterances back to confirm the researcher has heard it correctly, with little to no correction from the children. Children are able to tell stories using props and gestures (an indicator of Preschool-3 speaking) and initiate conversations with adults. On October 29<sup>th</sup>, Child C initiates a conversation with a teacher during their time at the dramatic play area:

Child C: Here's your dollar.  
Teacher: Thank you.  
C: What do you wanna buy?  
T: Um, I'll buy this pepper.  
C: Do you wanna buy this?  
T: Sure I'll buy that.  
C: Thank you very much. And you get this.

By November, children are speaking “clearly enough to be understood without context clues” (Dichtelmiller et al., 2001, p 38). At this level, which is considered to fall on the scale of Preschool-4, children are able to communicate with each other without having to clarify what the other said. In this November 10<sup>th</sup> excerpt between two children at the finger puppet theater, both are playing cooperatively without needing to clarify with each other.

T: Can you do a puppet show for me?  
G: Yeah.  
B: Can I play with you?  
G: Yeah. I'm being this. A seahorse.  
[B puts starfish on thumb and moves it to the stage, using a higher pitched voice.]  
B: I'm just a starfish. I'm just a starfish.

There is also an increase in the length of utterances. Children have moved from three to six word long utterances to telling full stories without teacher intervention. In November, Child I picks up a princess finger puppet and tells a story about her, using what she sees in the environment (a camera, the princess' wand), and answers the teacher's questions about the story.

Child I: There is a princess – there was a princess that, that saw a camera and then used it to take pictures of stuff. Of the movie theatre, of her hair and her wand.  
I: And she had a pet dragon. And then, the whale was a movie.  
[Child I is too quiet to hear for several utterances.]  
I: There was a queen and a princess and they were nice and they lived in a land.  
Teacher: They lived in a land?  
I: It was called Princess Land.

Although Child I is at times unintelligible only due to the volume of their voice compared to the volume of the surrounding environment, their story is elaborate and has several details about the princess. The quality of Child I's voice is clear enough to be understood by classroom visitors.

Child I's story represents what is being observed throughout the classroom by November.

Children that began in September with Preschool-3 level speaking are now at Preschool-4 levels and progressing quickly.

In December, children's expressive language is similar to what is seen at the Kindergarten level during dramatic play. The children are retelling the story of the *Three Billy Goats Gruff* with puppets coherently and without missing details. Some children may do this alone while others perform shows with their peers and teachers. Child A performs a puppet show of the *Three Billy Goats Gruff*, even using voices and props.

Child A: The billy goat went "trip trap trip trap". And the three little billy goats went "trip trap trip trap".

[Child A changes voice to troll]: Why are you going on my bridge? I'm gonna gobble you up.

[A as goat]: You don't want me. But my other brother.

[A as troll]: Ok.

[Goat]: Trip trap trip trap.

[A as second goat]: Now the second billy goat. Trip trap trip trap

[Troll]: Who's that doing all the trip trappin'? I'm gonna gobble you up.

[Second Goat]: But my other brother. My other brother is the bigger goat ever. Now the goat went trip trappin'.

[Third Goat]: Now the third billy goat went trip trappin' over the bridge.

[Troll]: Who's that on my bridge? I'm gonna gobble you up.

[Third Goat]: No. I'm gonna throw you off the bridge.

With each goat, Child A takes the time to switch goat puppets and make sure the puppet is on their hand properly before continuing. Child A's retelling of the story is clear and very close to the script that the actors used when they performed for the students earlier that day. Child A speaks loudly enough that they can be understood by their audience members over the volume of the classroom.

An observation from December 3<sup>rd</sup> shows the children using puppets to interact with each other in a way that has not previously been seen in the classroom. The following description is included in the observation notes: over the course of 15 minutes, six different children visit the

puppets and a game of catching and attacking the troll is created. There is not much dialogue, but the children all make various noises to illustrate what is happening to the troll. Children that have not previously used the puppets to interact with others are doing so. After this, the children move to other activities except for Child E. This child starts a script of the troll and wolf being friends and sharing cookies with each other, which goes back and forth for several minutes. The child, as the troll, hugs the wolf and accepts hugs and talks to the wolf (played by the teacher).

The children that are involved in the game work together using only their puppets to create this game and its rules: each time the troll is caught, it is released and the game resumes. Children that have not played together previously are interacting with each other and others that have not used the puppets in the past are manipulating them with ease. These children have watched the actors in the theater use the puppets and then create their own stories with the same puppets in a clear and coherent way.

One purpose of implementing the puppetry curriculum is to teach children some basic words about the theater, including “audience”, “applause”, and “perform”. These words are used during introductions to the puppet shows that are performed by the teachers and actors and then in the ICs that are used by the teachers during the free play time. For children, when they use these words, they are demonstrating the speaking performance indicator “uses expanded vocabulary and language for a variety of purposes” (Dichtelmiller et al., 2001, p. 40).

At the Preschool-3 level, children can be expected follow simple rules of conversation and are excited to use newly acquired words in conversation (Dichtelmiller et al., 2001, p. 40). Children are observed using words from past experiences. In one example, Child N uses the word “tickets” at their ticket stand. In the past, this child has explained to the teacher that the



tickets were for a carnival. In the following observation on October 22nd, Child N gives Child J tickets and this exchange occurs between the two:

Child N: I pay you, pay you, pay you.

Child J: I don't want a uh, I don't want, I don't want to pay.

N: I pay you. Here your tickets!

J: I can't take these too much tickets. She gave me too much tickets.

Teacher: Too many?

J: Yeah. Yeah there too many. Ummm. I have too many tickets. We only take one ticket.

T: Only one?

J: Yeah, that the rule.

Child N and Child J are making up dialogue for their conversation in the dramatic play area.

Child J understands that they did not need the multiple tickets they are given and told this to their conversation partner, as the children had been told that they only need one ticket each for the puppet show the teachers had performed a few days prior. Child N and Child J are using this “one ticket per child” information in their non-puppet show role play.

By November children are using the finger puppet theater to tell complex stories. These stories often have a beginning, middle, and ending. Often times, a child will close the curtain to signify that there is a pause in the action. Children are manipulating both the puppets and the theater with obvious intent in their actions. They are using the nonverbal body language that is taught to them by the teachers and actors during their puppet shows to tell the stories.

In December, children experiment with the “trip trap trip trap” onomatopoeia from the play they saw, using it and other forms of it in their dramatic play. Children initiate conversations more often than they have done in October or November. These conversations follow common rules such as turn-taking and staying on topic for extended periods of time. Several children are able to keep a game with the puppets going for an observed time of fifteen

minutes. These are all indicators that children have progressed to a Kindergarten level of speaking.

### *Reading*

When children enter preschool, they are expected to show an excitement towards books (Dichtelmiller et al., 2001, p. 42). In the CDLC children are encouraged to participate in shared-book reading during circle time and free choice time. Just like all other the materials children are allowed to choose from during free play, the books in the library are switched out periodically to keep the selections exciting, new, and related to the other activities.

Two performance indicators in the reading section are very similar and will be discussed together, these are the “shows appreciation for books” and the “comprehends and responds to stories read aloud” categories (Dichtelmiller et al., 2001, p. 42 & 50). At the Preschool-3 level, children are expected to be able to stay focused on a story in small groups, know how to hold a book upright and the direction to turn the pages in, and can recognize favorite books by their covers (Dichtelmiller et al., 2001, p. 42). In October, teachers read the children different versions of the *Three Little Pigs*, telling children that an author can write a version of a story however they want. The teachers also perform a puppet show version of the *Three Little Pigs*, encouraging children to try their own versions. Dichtelmiller et al., (2001) explains that children should be able to retell a story using hand puppets, as they are seen experimenting with in October with the puppets for the *Three Little Pigs*.

With the Preschool-4 skill level comes an important example of showing appreciation for books: “improvising dialogue for the re-enactment of a story in the dramatic play area” and “acting out a familiar story with their classmates” (Dichtelmiller et al., 2001, p. 42 & 50). This is

a skill that starts to form in mid-November but really shows itself in December after the theater field trip. The children all show interest in re-enacting the *Three Billy Goats Gruff* while using puppets. Other children re-enact puppet shows of the *Three Little Pigs* and *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, which are other stories they have watched puppet shows of previously in the year. Children are also beginning to experiment with creating voices for their puppets. This skill presents itself first in November, but continues to become more advanced by December.

### *Writing*

After the observation period in December, the researcher returns for an informal observation through the two-way mirror in the CDLC classroom. In February (two months after the last observation), children from the study are observed dictating stories to their teachers to be written down. These stories include scripts for their puppet shows for the teachers to narrate while the children performed. This dictation is a sign that children are beginning to understand that written words have an important meaning, an early step towards emergent writing (Dichtelmiller et al., 2001).

### **Discussion**

Of all of the areas of development studied during this research, the children of the CDLC show the most growth in their language abilities. While the children did in fact develop in all areas, the children developed significantly from performing at a Preschool-3 level to the Kindergarten level, a 2-year growth, in the span of October to December of the same year. The researcher set out with the hypothesis that the children would develop steadily in all areas over

three months. It was not foreseen that the children would develop as quickly as they did in their language abilities.

### *Effects of Puppetry on Language Development*

The classroom's average performance levels in the listening and speaking categories of language, which represent their receptive and expressive language skills goes from performing at their age level to performing at the level of a five-year old child. These three- and four-year old children were able to develop 2 years of important skills between October and December. This may be due to several factors in the dramatic play area and all over the classroom. The teachers used the IC technique when interacting with the children during their puppet shows to ask for more details and by the end of the three months, teachers did not need to ask for these details; the children were able to present them without the request. The teachers also used scaffolding in the dramatic play area to show children how to hold and use the types of puppets as well as to use voices and give their puppets character.

After the children attended the field trip to the theater to see the performance of the *Three Billy Goats Gruff* their language skills reached new levels. The children spent a larger amount of time using the puppets; some spent their entire free choice time behind the puppet stage on several occasions. The children that had spent more time with the puppets before the field trip were more often the ones that had the most sophisticated stories for the puppets after the field trip. Some children combined the stories of *The Three Little Pigs* and the *Three Billy Goats Gruff* to tell the story of how the wolf and the troll were friends. Children were not only retelling familiar stories; they were creating their own stories as well while using the puppets.

### *Effects of Puppetry on Literacy Development*

Early literacy development has two categories; reading and writing. Although the children did not show as much of a rapid development in these areas than they did in their language development, children went from performing at a Preschool-3 level to at the very least a Preschool-4 level by December. Children's focus when a teacher read books at circle time increased and children were able to relate the actions in a story to something that they had experienced in real life

The dramatic play area is a place for children to tell stories. Through the use of puppets and props, children are able to retell the stories that they had seen in puppet shows or read in books during circle time. This opportunity to tell stories allows children to build on their language skills and their literacy skills by knowing that words have specific meaning. In the CDLC classroom this eventually led to children dictating their stories to the teachers to be written down.

### *Effects of Puppetry on Children with Disabilities*

Although the focus of the study was not on children with disabilities, I couldn't help but notice one child in particular that showed a large amount of development in the dramatic play area. This child had entered preschool diagnosed with developmental delays. The child not only was performing in the puppet shows alongside their peers, but was entertained and laughed alongside their teachers during the children's performances. As the literature review showed, children with disabilities in an inclusive classroom are often encouraged to reach their full potential more often than children in separated classrooms. Puppets also aid in this, as they provided an extension for the children to practice social conventions.

By the end of the three months this child was interacting smoothly with both the puppets and the other children in the classroom. The child participated in several instances when the children created games of chasing and attacking the troll puppet and often brought the puppets to the teacher to show them. The child was also able to give the puppets voices and specific characteristics just as the other children had done. The puppets gave the child additional opportunities to participate in activities that they may not have typically participated in (the large group game of catching the troll) as well as giving the child one-on-one time with teachers to perform puppet shows for them.

#### *Limitations and Future Research*

The sample size of the study may have had an effect on the results that were received. An additional study with several classes of children or more frequent observation may allow for more results and a crisper analysis of the observations. Several children did not end up being observed during each observation period due to limited time constraints or the child's disinterest in the area. The researcher respected children's opinions and did not push children towards the dramatic play area if they felt more comfortable in a different area of the classroom. Another limitation was the fact that there was only a single observer with limited time constraints. This meant that children may have had puppet shows while the observer was not present in the classroom, but they could not be recorded.

One other important limitation is the lack of a control group. In the case of this experiment, two possible control groups would be a classroom without a dramatic play area or a classroom without a dedicated puppetry curriculum to discover what typical language development may have taken place. While dramatic play is encouraged in the CDLC, some

preschool classrooms do not have dramatic play, yet the children's language still develops. It is important to consider what development may have occurred in a classroom like this in comparison to the CDLC. However, due to the time constraints and lack of resources discussed above, it was difficult to find a classroom or have the time to observe one that did not utilize a dramatic play area.

Possible future research includes studying the specific effects puppetry and the dramatic play area as a whole have on children with disabilities, in particular, children with speech or language delays. Other aspects of the dramatic play area that could be studied include the use of dress-up materials provided, the role writing materials play on a child's literacy development, and the ways that puppetry can affect socialization in the dramatic play area.

## **Conclusion**

A dramatic play area is not just a place for children to dress-up or play pretend. The dramatic play area fosters creativity and opportunities for children to develop not only their language and literacy skills, but important life skills. The dramatic play area was often the location of several children interacting at once. Children that did not usually play with one another were able to create stories and build friendships from their puppet shows because they were able to collaborate and have more interactions than they may not otherwise would have had. Other children took pride in performing their shows for their peers and teachers. Children that did not generally play in the dramatic play area were drawn to the puppets.

After viewing the puppet show in the theater children had a new inspiration. After this field trip, several children that were not previously observed in the dramatic play area were suddenly participating in creating their own puppet shows and the improvisational games that the

children had created. The interactions from teachers in the puppet shows also decreased.

Teachers did not need to ask for more information from the children regarding the story; children included it as they told their own stories. For some children, the puppet area became their new favorite area. They would frequent it and spend their entire free choice period playing with puppets. Children did not discriminate against their playmates – instead, they played with anyone that would pick up a puppet and join them.



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## **Appendix A: October Observation Transcripts**

**October 20, 2015, 9:38AM, there is a puppet theatre outside during morning playtime. Inside the basket is a troll, some children, and bird puppets.**

[I picks up the pink, fluffy bird and manipulates the beak. She puts it back and picks through the basket. She picks up the troll puppet].

Teacher: What kind of puppet is that?

I: The kind of puppet that's a clown.

**October 20, 2015, 10:31 AM, during inside free play there is a farmer's market set up. The set-up includes play money, a cash register, and play food.**

Teacher: Can I buy this apple?

G: Yeah.

T: Oh no, but I don't have any money.

G: I got some dollars here.

**October 22, 2015 10:22AM, during inside free play, there is a farmer's market stand in the dramatic play area which includes a cash register, play money, and food.**

J: But where did it come from?

N: I pay you.

J: I want um...

N: I pay you, pay you, pay you.

J: I don't want a uh, I don't want, I don't want to pay.

N: I pay you. Here your tickets!

J: I can't take these too much tickets. She gave me too much tickets.

Teacher: Too many?

J: Yeah. Yeah there too many. Um. I have too many tickets. We only take one ticket.

T: Only one?

J: Yeah, that the rule.

N: Here. (hands flowers)

J: For my mommy.

T: For your mommy? They smell delicious

J: Let me smell them.

J: The bee gonna come get 'em. The bee gonna come get 'em and draw honey.

J: Why you playing in there? Why you playing in there?

T: (N), did you hear (J)? He asked a question.

J: Why a <unintelligible> and a crayon in there? Why a pencil and a cra- two crayon in there?

N: I know why. Cause a kid was here yesterday. A kid was here yesterday playing and he put a pen here. But they go to the writing table.

**October 29, 2015 10:07 AM, children are having free play in the classroom, farmers market in Dramatic Play area**

Teacher: What is that?

N: A banana. I have bananas at home.

T: You have bananas at home?

N: Yeah I do. Bananas are my favorite.

T: Are they really?  
N: Yeah they are, really, really, really.  
T: Are bananas fruits or vegetables?  
N: Fruits.  
T: What other fruits do you like?  
N: I like apples and cucumbers.  
T: Apples and cucumbers, yum.  
N: (Child B) wants a turn.  
T: Yeah, he'll go after you.  
N: Hey Child B, go find something else to do. I want him to go find something else to do.  
T: How many minutes do you need?  
N: 50 minutes.  
T: 50? Ok.  
N: Want a green pepper?  
T: Yeah.  
N: Its- And an apple, and a green pepper, and a plum. And a, and its, and...  
T: What's this?  
N: Sandwich bread.  
T: Sandwich bread.  
N: Tomatoes. Do you want a lemon?  
T: Sure.  
N: Want another plum?  
T: Uh-oh!  
N: Empty. Now it's (Child B)'s turn.  
[goes to the puppets]  
N: It's a dragon.  
T: Do you wanna play with it? Go ahead.  
N: He's eating the farmer's market!  
T: Oh no!  
[N takes an apple and puts it in the dragon's mouth]  
T: Now what's he doing?  
N: He's eating. [dragon bites farm stand]  
T: Oh he's still eating that. Oh that's scary.  
N: Now he's eating you!  
T: Oh no!  
[Child N repeatedly puts play money in dragon's mouth and hands it to the puppet the teacher is holding]  
N: Now a different one, now a different one.  
T: Now a different one?  
N: Now a different one. Now that one, that scary one, that scary one down there. That one, that blue one.  
T: What is this?  
N: He's a, he's a clown  
T: He's a clown? (in voice) Im a clown!  
[Child resumes passing papers]  
N: I'm gonna try a different animal.

T: There's a lot of different ones, or you could try a princess.  
N: Now I be him and sit there, and you be here and get the things for, for me.  
T: Ok.  
N: You stand right here where I'm standing.

**October 29, 2015 10:50 AM, children are at free play.**

C: Here's your dollar.  
Teacher: Thank you.  
C: What do you wanna buy?  
T: Um, I'll buy this pepper.  
C: Do you wanna buy this?  
T: Sure I'll buy that.  
C: Thank you very much. And you get this

**Oct. 20 2015, 9:06 AM, outside play during drop-off, a puppet stage and a basket of puppets are outside**

Teacher: I wanna watch.  
A: Rah rah rah rah rah rah rah!  
T: Ah you're so scary!  
A: (In girl's voice) ahhhh!  
A: (As troll) Rah rah rah rah rah! (Pauses, shuts curtains)  
T: Is the show over?  
A: Nope, I'm gonna do even more scarier.  
T: Even more scarier? Oh no.  
A: But you don't gotta run away  
T: Ok, I wanna watch  
A: It's just gonna be real... (trails off)  
A: (as troll) Why would you?  
T: Ahhh!  
A: (troll) Why? What do you want you? Rah rah rah rah! One of you can be run away!  
A: (as girl) Ahhh!  
A: (troll) Who can run away?

## **Appendix B: November Observation Transcriptions**

**November 10, 2015, 10:34 AM, there is now a finger puppet theatre in the classroom.**

Teacher: Can you do a puppet show for me?

G: Yeah.

B: Can I play with you?

G: Yeah. I'm being this. A seahorse.

[B puts starfish on thumb and moves it to the stage, using a higher pitched voice]

B: I'm just a starfish. I'm just a starfish.

**November 10, 2015 10:37 AM, at finger puppet theatre.**

Teacher: Can I watch your puppet show?

K: Yeah

T: What is that?

A: A witch.

T: What's the witch say?

A [in a high pitched voice]: he he he he he!

**November 10, 2015 10:44AM, at finger puppet theatre**

I: There is a princess – there was a princess that, that saw a camera and then used it to take pictures of stuff. Of the movie theatre, of her hair and her wand.

[I is too quiet to hear for several utterances.]

I: And she had a pet dragon. And then, the -unintelligible- the whale was a movie.

[I is too quiet to hear for several utterances.]

I: There was a queen and a princess and they were nice and they lived in a land.

Teacher: They lived in a land?

I: It was called Princess Land.

[I is interrupted by a child and walks away.]

**November 12,2015, 10:33 AM, at finger puppet theatre**

Teacher: What are you doing, D?

Child D: I'm in the house.

T: You're in the house? (to other child) Wanna watch his puppet show? Oh, what is that?

D: A octopus

T: An octopus?

D: Yeah.

T: What does he do?

D: [unintelligible 2 words] and got these fins.

T: Does he swim?

D: Yeah. He swim in the water.

T: In the water? What else does he do?

D: Um. Water

T: What's he do in the water?

D: I dunno. He [unintelligible] with other fish.

T: Wow, what's that one?

D: A dragon.

T: (misheard) A giant?  
D: A dragon.  
T: A dragon?  
D: Yes  
T: Oh. That's scary.  
D: I'm a dragon.  
T: He's scary.  
D: No. He [unintelligible]  
T: What's he say?  
D: Rawr  
D: Hey.  
T: Hey

**November 12, 10:38 AM, at finger puppet theatre**

Teacher: Can I watch too?  
A: Mhm.  
T: Ok.  
K: I wanna see.  
T: I wanna watch it.  
K: It's a crab! It's a crab! It's a crab.  
T: It's a crab?  
K: Yeah it's a yellow crab!  
A: Nobody can look!  
T: Ok we won't look.  
A: This is only for me.  
[A puts puppets on all of her fingers.]  
A: Glub glub glub. No looking.  
T: Not yet.  
A: Blub blub blub blub blub blub blub. (Sings a song repeating blub)  
[A walks away and K takes her spot behind the theatre.]  
[A sits in the "audience" and laughs as K holds different puppets on the stage.]  
A: Hey (k) I love the princess one. And the prince one. Do that one.

**November 17, 11:01 AM, at finger puppet theater**

C: I found a witch.  
Teacher: What does she do?  
C: Mopping, mopping. (has witch use her broom to "mop")  
T: What does she have?  
C: A mop!  
T: What's it for?  
C: Mop. I found the witch [unintelligible]. I found a witch

**November 17, 11:06 AM, at finger puppets**

J: I'm swimming, swimming. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha. [gets out next puppet] I'm a, I'm a king.  
[lowers voice] I'm a king. I'm a witch. A sea star. I'm a sea star. I'm a singing sea star.

**November 19, 2015, 10:59 AM, at finger puppets**

M: The fishies. Two fishies! Ahhhhh! [one fish crashes into the other]

M: Fishie swimmin' in the pond. Ahhhhhh! I ran into the octopus! Help me, help me!

M: [changes voice] Mean no harm, dragon. Let me in! Nooo!

M: [manipulating King and dragon puppet] Let me in, and I'll huff and puff and blow your house down! Ahhhhhh! What you doing daddy? I know what you did. Come out come out.

[Shuts curtains]

**November 24, 10:34 AM, at finger puppets**

K: Rah! Rah, rah, rah! [sticks dragon through stage]

Teacher: Oh, scary!

K: Rah, rah, rah, rah, rah!

T: He's gonna eat her?

K: Rah, rah, rah

K: Rah! [attacks teacher]

T: Oh no

[K carefully puts puppets on her fingers]

K: [brings puppets out] GrrrrrrrrrrrrRRRRRRRrrrrrRRRRRrrrr!



## **Appendix C: December Observation Transcriptions**

### **December 1, 10:21AM, Billy Goats Gruff with hand puppets**

Child A: The billy goat went "trip trap trip trap". And the three little billy goats went "trip trap trip trap".

[Child A changes voice to troll]: Why are you going on my bridge? I'm gonna gobble you up.

[A as goat]: You don't want me. But my other brother.

[A as troll]: Ok.

[Goat]: Trip trap trip trap.

[A as second goat]: Now the second billy goat. Trip trap trip trap

[Troll]: Who's that doing all the trip trappin'? I'm gonna gobble you up.

[Second Goat]: But my other brother. My other brother is the bigger goat ever. Now the goat went trip trappin'.

[Third Goat]: Now the third billy goat went trip trappin' over the bridge.

[Troll]: Who's that on my bridge? I'm gonna gobble you up.

[Third Goat]: No. I'm gonna throw you off the bridge.

### **December 1, 10:40 AM, at finger puppet theatre**

Teacher: Can I be the dragon? (C nods)

C: Can I?

T: Sure you can be the dragon. Want me to be the crab?

C: Yeah. Rawr!

T: Pinch pinch, pinch pinch

C: Rawr!

### **December 1, 10:44AM, Billy Goats Gruff with hand puppets**

J: Trip trap, trip trap!

T: Who's that trip trappin over my bridge?

J: Its only me, it's me. The king knight!

T: Well I'm gonna gobble you up.

J: No I'm gonna gobble you up first. I'm gonna gobble you up.

T: You're gonna gobble me up? Oh no.

J: Gobble!

J: Hey wanna be different. Hey you wanna be, hey, hey, hey, hey you're gonna be the bad guy!

You're the bad guy!

T: Who's that trip trapping over my bridge?

J: I'm the king knight!

T: You're the king?

J: I'm the king knight.

T: Ohhh.

T: I'm gonna eat you!

J: You're not gonna eat me. I have my team; I have my team. I got my team. I have my team.

We're gonna fight!

T: I'm still gonna eat you up.

J: Rawr, we'll you up!

T: Ohhh

J: Hey you stop right there!  
T: I'm stopped.  
T: Who's that trip trapping over my bridge?  
J: I'm a goat. And I'm a goat. We're goats.  
T: I eat goats.  
J: Hey I want you on my team (to peer).

### **December 3, 9:23 AM**

Over the course of 15 minutes, 6 different children visit the puppets. A game of catching and attacking the troll is creating. There is not much dialogue, but the children all make various noises to illustrate what is happening to the troll. Children that have not previously used the puppets to interact with others are doing so.

After this, the children dissipate to other activities except for child E. This child starts a script of the troll and wolf being friends and sharing cookies with each other, which goes back and forth for several minutes. The child, as the troll, hugs the wolf and accepts hugs and talks to the wolf (teacher)

T: Like cookies?  
E: I love cookies. I like cookies too!

### **December 3, 9:38 AM, Billy Goats Gruff with hand puppets**

D: Gonna eat you up.  
T: You're gonna eat me up? I'll eat you up! Why don't we eat the goat?  
E: Don't eat the goat!  
T: Are you trip trappin' over my bridge?  
D: Yeah.  
T: Well I'm gonna eat you up!  
D: I will eat you up!  
E: I ate the goat up.  
T: And the goat ate me.  
D: Yummy  
T: I tasted yummy?  
D: Yes  
E: No.  
D: Num num num

### **December 3, 10:50 AM, at finger puppet theatre**

T: What's the witch say?  
D: Ah ha ha  
D: Blub blub, I'm a fish! Blub blub, I'm a fish!

### **Dec. 3 11:00am, Billy Goats Gruff with hand puppets**

I: Clip clap clip clap

## Appendix D: Permission to study Human Subjects from the Institutional Review Board

**APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH WITH HUMAN SUBJECTS**  
 Protection of Human Subjects Review Board, 114 Alumni Hall, 581-1498

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Megan Rounds  
 EMAIL: [megan.rounds@umit.maine.edu](mailto:megan.rounds@umit.maine.edu) TELEPHONE: 240-298-6516  
 CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):  
 FACULTY SPONSOR (Required if PI is a student): Margo Brown, Dr. Julie DellaMattera  
 TITLE OF PROJECT: Pulling Strings: A study on how puppetry affects the early language and literacy development of preschool-aged children

START DATE: 10/10/2015 PI DEPARTMENT: Communication Sciences and Disorders, Child Development and Family Relations  
 MAILING ADDRESS: 17 Hayes St. Apartment 2, Old Town, ME. 04468  
 FUNDING AGENCY (if any):  
 STATUS OF PI: FACULTY/STAFF/GRADUATE/UNDERGRADUATE Undergraduate

1. If PI is a student, is this research to be performed:
 

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> for an honors thesis/senior thesis/capstone?	<input type="checkbox"/> for a master's thesis?
<input type="checkbox"/> for a doctoral dissertation?	<input type="checkbox"/> for a course project?
<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)	
2. Does this application modify a previously approved project? No (Y/N). If yes, please give assigned number (if known) of previously approved project:
3. Is an expedited review requested? Yes (Y/N).

Submitting the application indicates the principal investigator's agreement to abide by the responsibilities outlined in [Section I.E. of the Policies and Procedures for the Protection of Human Subjects](#).

Faculty Sponsors are responsible for oversight of research conducted by their students. The Faculty Sponsor ensures that he/she has read the application and that the conduct of such research will be in accordance with the University of Maine's Policies and Procedures for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research. **REMINDER:** if the principal investigator is an undergraduate student, the Faculty Sponsor **MUST** submit the application to the IRB.

**Email complete application to Gayle Jones ([gayle.jones@umit.maine.edu](mailto:gayle.jones@umit.maine.edu))**

\*\*\*\*\*  
**FOR IRB USE ONLY** Application # 2015-10-09 Date received 10/07/2015 Review (F/E): E  
 Expedited Category:

**ACTION TAKEN:**

- |                                     |   |                           |                          |
|-------------------------------------|---|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Judged Exempt; category 1               | Modifications required? 1 | Accepted (date) 10/28/15 |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | Approved as submitted.                  | Date of next review: by   | Degree of Risk:          |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | Approved pending modifications.         | Date of next review: by   | Degree of Risk:          |
|                                     | Modifications accepted (date):          |                           |                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | Not approved (see attached statement)   |                           |                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | Judged not research with human subjects | 10/28/15                  |                          |
|                                     | FINAL APPROVAL TO BEGIN                 | Date                      |                          |

08/2015

## **Appendix E: Form for Informed Consent**

You are being asked to provide permission for your child to participate in an academic research study on how puppetry affects the early language and literacy development of young preschool students.

This research is being conducted by Megan Rounds, an undergraduate student in the Honors College and a double major in Communication Sciences and Disorders and Child Development and Family Relations as a graduation requirement through the Honors College. Her faculty sponsors are Margo Brown, Coordinator of the Learning Center and Dr. Julie DellaMattera, Department Chair of the Educational Leadership, Higher Education, and Human Development Department.

### **What is involved?**

Your children will be given the opportunity to play with puppets, create and design puppets for their own show, write or dictate scripts for their own shows, and will then perform the show for their peers, teachers, and family members! I will be observing the children during class time during the entire Fall semester and then once again in February to follow-up with the children. In order to gather data, I will be using audio and video recordings that will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office of Merrill Hall. I may also take photographs of your child to use in my final presentation to my Thesis Committee. This identifying data will be deleted in June of 2016.

### **Possible Risks involved in participation:**

As this unit is built into everyday classroom life, there is no risk in participating with the study. The children are always encouraged to try all sections of the classroom, but if they are not interested in the dramatic play area or the puppets, they will not be forced to try. Observations are always on-going in the Learning Center classroom, and the same observation methods will be used by the researcher and facilitated by Margo Brown. Therefore, these observations will be non-invasive to the children or their learning environment.

### **The benefits from this study may include the following:**

- Your children are given the opportunity to learn about puppets and puppeteers, and they will be able to invent their own fairytales and create and perform in their own, real puppet show.
- For the educational community, there may be additional research regarding how dramatic play, and puppetry in particular, benefits preschool children.

### **Data Collect and Confidentiality**

Confidentiality is of the utmost importance. The children will never be referred to by their real names during the study. A key connecting the children's names and their code for the study will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in Margo Brown's office. This is the only copy that will exist and no electronic data will ever be created that would allow someone to identify your child unless they had access to the code as well. This key will be destroyed upon the completion of my thesis in June of 2016. All related data will also be deleted then.

The videos and audio used in data collection are the recording devices in the Merrill Hall classroom. No videos, audio, or photographs will be taken with any other recording device. This gathered documentation will be stored on a secure, encrypted computer and deleted in June of 2016.

**Voluntary:**

Your child's participation in the study is voluntary.

All children will be involved with the puppets and the puppet show. It is your choice as to whether or not any observations will be included in the research.

Also please understand that at any time, you will be welcome to withdraw your child from the study and all data collected involving them will be deleted.

**Contact Information:**

You may contact the Principal Investigator, Megan Rounds, by emailing [megan.rounds@umit.maine.edu](mailto:megan.rounds@umit.maine.edu) or by calling 240-298-6516 and leaving a message. She will respond within 24 hours to all queries related to the study.

You may contact Margo Brown, a faculty advisor for this study and Coordinator of the Learning Center by emailing her directly at [margo.brown@umit.maine.edu](mailto:margo.brown@umit.maine.edu) or by calling her office at 207-581-3123.

You may contact Dr. Julie DellaMattera, a faculty advisor for this study by emailing her directly at [Julie.dellamattera@umit.maine.edu](mailto:Julie.dellamattera@umit.maine.edu) or by calling her office at 207-581-3118.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Gayle Jones, Assistant to the University of Maine's Protection of Human Subjects Review Board, at 207-581-1498 (or e-mail [gayle.jones@umit.maine.edu](mailto:gayle.jones@umit.maine.edu)).

**Permission:**

Your signature below indicates that you have read the above information and will allow your child to participate in the academic study. You will receive a copy of this form for your records and the original copy will be stored in a locked filing cabinet.

\_\_\_\_\_ I give permission for observations of my child to be used for research purposes.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do NOT give permission for observations of my child to be used for research purposes.

Child's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\*For parents with multiple children enrolled in the preschool, please fill out a form for each child.

## About the Author

Megan Eileen Rounds is from Kennebunk, Maine. She attended Kennebunk High School and took part in several extracurricular activities such as the Swim Team, dramatic arts, Mock Trial, and Youth in Government. During these years, she also worked as a nanny and babysitter for several families.

After graduating high school in 2012, she attended the University of Maine, earning a dual Bachelor's degree in Communication Sciences and Disorders and Child Development and family Relations. She also took additional courses to earn a minor in Theater. During her four years at the university, Megan was a member of Improv In Sanity, the university's improvisational acting group; Maine Masque, the university's dramatic arts organization; and the National Student Speech Hearing Language Association (NSSHLA) as well as working at the university's child care center.

Megan graduated from the University of Maine in 2016 and has gone on to attend the University of New Hampshire's Communication Sciences and Disorders Master's program with a focus in Early Childhood Language Intervention. Megan lives in Dover, NH and enjoys playing Frisbee with her border collie, Finn and attending local theatre events. Megan currently works in the Infant/Toddler Wing at the University of New Hampshire Child Study and Development Center while attending her Master's program.