

Designing for Children 2019

- Play and Learn

How to design a safe space for children's tangible tellings

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Abstract: The most dominant language worldwide is verbal and it leaves less and less space for the unspoken. The visual language of stop motion offers an opportunity for kids to access their own creativity in a non verbal way. Through working with their hands and sensing the different tactile materials they experience an important inner dialogue and contemplation.

Through the complex method of producing their own animations they can visualize and describe complex issues in an appealing and easy accessible way and this represents a great value.

Key words: *hands-on learning, tangible telling, thinking with your hands, play turned into knowledge. Design thinking, learning by doing, co-creation, reflective practioner. Analogue + digital methods.*



4 kids set and puppets for their stop motion film.

1.0 How to design a safe space for childrens tangible telling

1.1 What?

I have tutored both children, young people and adults in stop motion for over 15 years.

My approach to tutoring has always been hands-on and learning by doing and playing.

Experiencing how working with different materials can inspire children to not only play and learn but intuitively understand the subject, animated me to combine materials and the narrative.

Everybody loves a good story. By starting with sculpting the characters and having the first success within 12 minutes children find it so easy to be inspired by the material and come up with a story.

They free their creative potential and learning the complex process of how to make stop motion films becomes easy.

Doing and acting comes first- analyzing and braking the process down into theory comes later.

1.2 Why?

My goal with animation workshops is always to make it present and tangible for each child to learn through play and express themselves through already existing resources they have within themselves. All they need is boundaries and a structured framework to make the most of their creativity. They never question these boundaries, maybe because the whole set up seems so playful.

2.0 How - does the method work?

First of all i start by giving each pupil a lump of plasticine and ask them to create a character out of one colour only. I create my own puppet simultaneously with them, to make them feel safe and to show it, don't tell it.



A basic puppet made in one color only

It looks like a simple task that they solve intuitively and that creates an instant feeling of success. At a certain point this task actually requires skillful fingers and is tricky, but the pupils are given the choice between a simpler version of making the puppets hands. But all of them TRY making it and many of the them actually succeed.

No questions asked and no doubt whatsoever that they can handle it. This would not happen, had I asked them to draw the character! Lots of insecurity issues when it comes to putting pen to paper. But not when it involves an intuitive material like plasticine and the shaping of it!

While we sculpt I tell them what's going to happen to during the workshop and who I am - I create a safe space for them where there is no hierarchy, because we are still playing.

Once they have their character i ask them to choose different coloured plasticine and add details like eyes , hair, buttons, patterns a.so. to the puppet.



A whole class' production of puppets that are made unique by adding details.

Not till now do we start talking about the task ahead, the subject for the workshops and issues like who will be working with who.

Usually I get asked to work with a class by their usual teacher. I always ask this teacher to make the groups beforehand. I do this because this teacher knows about all the going on between the pupils. Since I don't know the pupils, I don't have any preconceived idea of who they are and what they are capable of. This is a BIG advantage. Turns out that one or two pupils show great potential within this media of expressing themselves and nobody knew till now. This I a very important discovery for both the kid and the teacher. It opens up for the kid to be taught and express her-/himself in a different manner than the verbal or the written.

The pupils work together in groups of 5 intensely and over a long time, maybe 4-7 hours. (depending on their age and with breaks in between). They decide on who has the role of the director, the animator, the set- builder and so on. They have conflicts during the execution of the task, off course. It is a complex process. But most of them end up being proud of their animation and especially of their character, which they want to take home with them.



2 boys showing off their puppets during a sculpting workshop.

We finish the workshop by watching all the films together and sometimes we make an “Oscar Night” of it and invite the parents or the whole school.

The workshop is a mixture of me demonstrating techniques like how to make a story board, how to build sets out of cardboard, how to animate, how to choose the right camera angle to tell the story the best way possible and the children are learning it by doing itand making mistakes.

Once they have their story board ready the children have to pitch their idea to the rest of class, get feedback and improve their story. The last part is the most difficult. They really don’t like to change their idea once it is on paper. The first idea isn’t automatically the best – it is just their first idea. This can be helped along by asking the feedback groups to be very specific in their comments. Did they understand the story and the actions of the characters. At this point you really have to push the groups to act on the feedback and change for the better.



Finishing a workshop doing the red carpet, pop corn and Oscar-event for a bigger audience at school

They build sets out of cardboard and they bring the characters to life when they animate every single frame and create movement and life. We record the animation via a free animation app on ipads or mobile phones. At the very end the pupils record their own sounds, voices and find the right music for their film.



Kids just about to start to recordings after finishing the set, props and puppets.

We finish the workshop by having a proper world premiere of their films including a red carpet, popcorn and prizes for everybody.

3.0 For whom?

The children must be no younger than 7 years of age. The concept of time and duration is too abstract for them if they are younger than that. I have worked with every age from 7-18 years (and onwards).

3.1 What subjects?:

The subjects for the workshops for primary schools has been visualizations of friendship, bullying, how to create a sense of belonging. These subjects are complex and the unspoken can be visualized in a way you can't do verbally.

For older pupils I have worked with subjects like the visualization of UN's goals for sustainability for 2030. I.e. goal no 1. Stop poverty. How do I make the theme present and relevant for a group of 11 year olds in the western world that probably haven't experienced poverty in the shape of hunger. A theme like this can easily leave the pupils in a state of hopelessness and wanting to give up on such an intangible issue. I gave each group a note that said:

Stop poverty.

“How do we turn UN's goals on sustainability into everyday goals for the school children?

We make a commercial that shows the audience how and why you should donate, things you own, but don't use to the socially disadvantaged in your community.

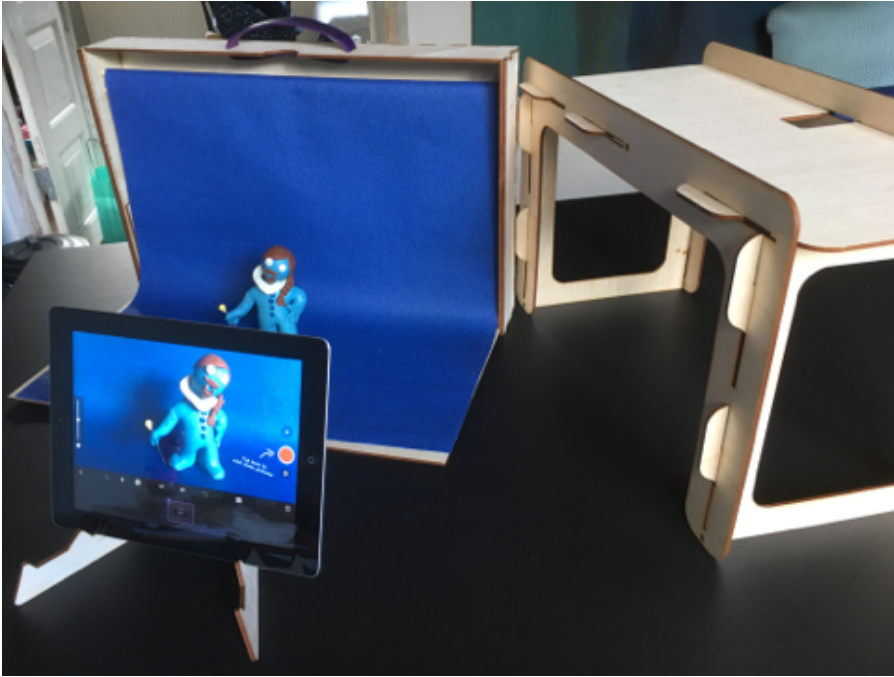
-Be the change”

That way the intangible is made present and relevant to each student. Because everybody knows the visual language of a commercial, we don't spend much time on HOW to make it, but the time is spent on the inner dialogue and individual reflection on the topic.

4.0 Additional design for stop motion animation:

In addition to the actual design of the workshop, I have developed an Animation Suitcase, which is a mobile learning environment that contains everything you need to produce stop motion films.

How to create your own films becomes very accessible through this creative tool. Each group of five pupils work around an Animation Suitcase.



The animation suitcase opens up as a backdrop. There are two different phone/ipad/tableholders, so you can film both horizontally and vertical.

The suitcase opens up as a backdrop for your setting. Inside is plasticine for 5 different coloured puppets, containers for each puppet that can double as props for your film, an Ipad-stand and extra plasticine to spice up the different characters. All you need to add is a mobile phone/ iPad for each group and download a free animation app.

You can take the suitcase to the classroom, the library, the youth club, workplace, to your friends house or on holiday.



The suitcase works as a mobile animation studio that can be taken to a festival for kids like in the photos .

5.0 Conclusions

The benefit of this way of working is that it breaks down the usual barriers children can have towards learning. Throughout this type of practical workshops it is always striking how easy and light the children take to the task. However negative or complex the subject might be the method seems so playful and appealing and it intuitively encourages them to take action.

This method makes the intangible tangible, present and relevant to the children. It enables them to enhance the focus on the actual subject. They learn through physically making things -not only by thinking.

-thinking with your hands so to speak.

Reference

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