

# “Puppetry and Opera Are Striking.” Students’ Experiences of Collaboration and Curiosity in Puppetry Opera as a Case Study

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## Abstract

This paper will focus on the possibilities of puppetry and opera in early childhood education studies (ECE), and among children in day care in a class of twenty 4–5-year-olds. The research centres around 200 university students in the middle of a project on opera and puppetry in their ECE programme. Opera is about strong emotions (see Trevarthen 2012, 263), and puppetry is a vehicle to make feelings visible (Lintunen, 2009, Majaron 2012, 11, Scheel, 2012). Puppetry and opera can be used in collaboration, and they are combined in this ECE programme as a part of the university studies in drama and literary arts. A method called *Pritney* has been created to realize the project. The theoretical background consists of puppetry and literary arts. The paper will present some findings from cases in which puppetry and opera have been used experimentally with ECE students, and subsequently with kindergarten children. There is a need for collaborative encounters during the processes of puppetry and opera. Based on the observations and remarks of university students doing their *puppetry and opera project*, this paper considers the value of conveying puppetry and opera to a child audience as a stimulation for curiosity and emotions. All this reflection is followed by the examples of practice in ECE studies. Performing opera with puppets is beneficial. In summary, the artistic experiments created by puppetry and opera are valuable in transferring cultural heritage and creating aesthetic and pedagogical moments. There is also a short consideration of a project called “Rinnalla–Hand in Hand” (2018–2020) funded by Finnish ministry of education, in which the Pritney method is further developed (see also Suvilehto 2019).

**Keywords:** drama education, early childhood education, opera, Pritney method, puppetry

## 1. Introduction

“It is so true that strong emotions are essential in opera.” (Student T, 2018)

“The idea of opera and puppetry for me is great and I find this combination very interesting. I have never heard of this before.” (Student T, 2018)

“Opera and puppetry are very impressive and interesting. I think that this kind of activity will make a lot of sense for children, to use opera in different tasks. The atmosphere consists of multiple things. There is music, lights, costumes, movements, stage settings and sounds.” (Student O, 2018)

“At the beginning I felt suspicious, which melted very soon: this is a brilliant idea to combine puppets and opera music. I think these elements were so good, during the course, that I will apply them in practice with children.” (Student EA, 2018)

We assessed a puppet opera project among Early Childhood Education (ECE) students in 2018 at a northern university in Finland. ECE students (= 200) attended the course and wrote a self-evaluation and reflection on what they had learned: how the students felt about puppet opera before the “Literary Art and Drama Education” course and after. These quotations from the students’ reflections and their feedback highlight the interaction and activities what the students are doing with each other during and after puppetry opera experiences and explorations. These kinds of activities are new and intend to refresh our conceptions of the possibilities of early childhood drama education. The aim of this study is also to promote the transformation of these new ideas into suitable activities in day care among children.

During the Third Transnational Opera Studies Conference (2019) in Paris, I managed to attend sessions on new studies and research about the great tradition of opera. The sessions discussed cases from different countries and related to various centuries. Opera studies were also advanced and renewed for future generations in relation to current topics such as gender and environmentalism, animal rights, and ecological challenges (Opera programme, 2019). A lot of interesting topics were discussed, but none of them pertained to the possibilities of opera among children, or opera and puppetry. Here in this short presentation of puppetry opera cases in the context of early childhood education studies in a northern university in Finland I hope to get an initial glimpse of these possibilities and thus make it possible to later pass these experiments on to day care and other ECE settings.

Children quite often wish to acquaint themselves with actors and puppets. Majaron (2012, 16) emphasises that puppets, and the combination of visual expression and music, may contribute to a more humane and less stressful approach to education, especially among children when they are integrating themselves into a group. Puppets arouse imagination and creativity in particular (Majaron, 2012, 16).

”In this study, the Pritney method was used to offer puppetry to children in day care in 2019 as well as to first- and second-year ECE students in 2018 in a northern university in Finland. I will discuss eight students’ views as presented in their writings before and after the studies of puppetry opera cases during their ECE studies. Planning, practicing, and acting are the main goals for professional puppet players (Korošec, 2012, 30), and ECE students must keep these goals in mind when assessing their own short plays during their literary art and drama studies. When working with children within the scope of the curriculum, the goals relate to the growth and development of the child/puppet player (Curriculum, 2018; Korošec, 2012, 30). There are also pedagogical and personal goals associated with the students’ learning. I will also make some remarks on the use of the so-called Pritney method to hold a short puppetry opera among a group of day care children in 2019, and reactions are quoted from one ECE teacher and one child (name changed for ethical reasons and for the sake of anonymity).

This paper offers a short theoretical background in which I discuss children’s drama, puppetry, and some ideas about the collaboration of puppetry and opera to give the reader a brief overview of puppetry and opera. I will examine puppetry opera cases in ECE studies and in day care, reflecting on the broader issues and insights that emerge when dealing with puppets

in education. The method used is content analysis of the literature; ethical issues have been considered, and the students' views have been anonymised.

### **1.1 Early childhood education studies**

First, I will provide some background information about the education programme in which I have been teaching literature and drama for ten years. The basic education programme in the Faculty of Education leads to the degree of Master of Arts in Education, and it provides eligibility for doctoral studies and qualification for a variety of expert duties in the field of education. The programmes qualify the student as a teacher at different levels from kindergarten to adult education depending on the specialisation (ECE 2019). The basis for the studies is provided by the various tasks of ECE and covers the following areas among others: early childhood education training and planning, early childhood research and transmission of knowledge on early childhood education, and direction and management of ECE organisations. (ECE 2019.) "The education is a comprehensive pedagogical programme that aims at fostering the welfare of children and families in various educational, teaching and expert tasks in early childhood education and children's culture. The students complete a 180-credit Bachelor's degree followed by a 120-credit Master's degree. The education also qualifies them as kindergarten teachers." (ECE 2019.)

### **1.2 Genres of children's drama in early childhood education**

"Literary Art and Drama Education" is a compulsory course in the ECE degree programme. During the course, the students learn about genres of both children's drama and puppets and children's literature. They learn about creativity, collaboration, and about how to create and perform a play for a real audience. They may also produce self-made puppets, such as hand puppets, finger puppets, larger puppets, easy marionettes, and paper puppets (cardboard puppet/paper theatre/"table theatre"). They may practise shadow theatre, masks, improvisation, and pantomime. "Puppet" refers to a theatre puppet for performing, which differs from a toy doll a child might play with (Lintunen, 2009, 13) Playing on stage with a puppet is referred to as animated puppeteering or operating with a puppet. In this study, I will use the word *puppeteer* to refer to an operator of the puppet, she/he who is playing with and figuratively manipulating the puppet. Different types of puppets may be combined in one show. For example, shadow theatre may offer moments for exploring fine motor skills in considering what it is possible to create with one's fingers. A puppet is a mediator in communication, and the actor/student communicates with the audience through this mediator (Korošec, 2012, 34).

### **1.3 Collaboration of joint intellectual and artistic efforts in puppetry opera**

The brief definition of opera is that it consists of music, singing, stage activities, and strong emotions (see Batta, 2001, 146–147, 565). The brief definition of puppetry is activities with puppets in such an artistic way that the symbolic value of a puppet makes it appear real, so there is an aspect of animation (Lintunen, 2009).

What is the difference between "collaborative" and "cooperative" when we are talking about drama or learning? According to Smith and MacGregor (1992), collaborative learning is an umbrella term for a variety of educational approaches that involve the joint intellectual efforts of students, like "students' exploration of the course material." Opera is collaborative in a sense that it involves consideration of lots of different aspects and specializations skills: there is clothing, masking, stage performance, music, the orchestra, etc. (Mälkki, 2019). Panitz (1996)

states that collaborative learning means consensus-building through cooperation by group members, while LeJeune (2003) describes collaborative learning as a common task of activities. Collaborative learning (CL) is an educational approach in which people work together to solve a problem, complete a task, or create a product (Laal & Laal, 2012). In puppetry opera, the common task may be regarded as making a short performance of puppetry opera, so one needs to concentrate on puppets, music, lights, movements, clothes, etc. in collaboration with other group members in addition to considering the strong emotions commonly associated with opera (see Mälkki, 2019, Batta, 2001, 565). In the field of theatre, collaboration is widely practiced and studied (e.g. in play writing and joint work in theatrical production) (see Hirschfeld, 2004, pp. 1–15).

#### **1.4 Pritney method's ideas**

Pritney method is developed around the ideas of a pony-figure hand puppet (puppetry) and the literary arts and drama possibilities in educational settings. Pritney puppet has served as a pedagogical puppet for over five years in Early childhood education university studies in literature and drama in a northern university. The method is named after a real pony called Pritney, who has been a source of inspiration in pedagogical training projects among ECE students. Pritney method is constantly further developed (see Rinnalla—Hand in hand 2018—2020, Ministry of education).

In short, this means:

- 1) Initial warm-ups can be a moment of exercise, singing, or other physical activity, where the body and mind are awakened (enticed) to action.
- 2) Getting to know the subject through Pritney's reflection and example can be a small wake-up call from the teacher that arouses curiosity and a desire to grasp the subject.
- 3) Practical exploration, activities
- 4) Reflection: what kind of thoughts and experiences I felt
- 5) Thank you, the instructor's encouraging feedback, and the sharing of experiences.

Each session lasts just the right amount of time. The use of time depends on the needs and structure of the group. It may take up to a few minutes. Sometimes it can take up to 20-30 minutes to focus on a topic, depending on the size, age and alertness of the group of children. Activities and transitions are intense. It is not intended to wear out the child while working. The composition and moods of the groups are diverse. Sometimes activities last for a short period, sometimes you want to continue the activities for several days, in a process-like manner. It is intended that the activities may live beyond these intense moments in the day-to-day life of the nursery, meaning that children will be given the opportunity to pursue the subject in their own play or, if possible, under adult supervision, even for several weeks. Background theories of the method are related to bibliotherapy and the integrative ideas of the latest Early Childhood Education Plan (VASU 2018). Considerations are also related to socio-emotional phenomena, and the metaphoric power of a puppet.

## **2. Research design**

### **2.1 Research goal**

The goal of this research is to investigate the idea of puppetry opera among first-year and second-year university students' explorations: The study considers the possibilities of these activities in promoting curiosity, emotions, and collaboration within literary art and drama education as part of students' ECE studies. The research goal is also to examine the possibilities of puppetry and opera performed for a child audience with the Pritney method. The paper is grounded on the notions of theory and practice. The research question is: What are the possibilities of the Pritney method in early childhood education for promoting collaboration, curiosity, and emotions through the combination of opera and puppetry?

### **2.2 Participants and data**

40 short puppetry opera plays were assessed by 200 ECE students in a northern university in Finland in 2018. Each year 60 new students begin their studies; they take their literary art and drama course (five credits) in three different groups, with each group consisting of 20 students. Moreover, second year students have put their own short opera cases during their second-year course in literary art and drama studies (five credits). Each of the opera cases are unique in a sense that a small group of five students create in collaboration a five-minute show, which includes music, puppetry, and poems to be combined as a short story. Each of these small puppetry operas has a different story. Students' puppetry opera shows are then performed in the university's drama studio and in a kindergarten.

At the beginning of the course the students explore and write one page about their preliminary knowledge relating to puppetry and opera and how they feel about it. Then the students attend a course in which we assess the possibilities of combining puppets and opera music. At the end of the drama course, each student will write one page reflecting on what she/he has learned, understood, and felt, and what personal development may have occurred. Thus, the data consists of about 400 pages (A4) of students' self-reflection on the drama education. All writings from the study period were read, but only a few cases are considered in this paper. The focus here is the students' reflections on their experiences and the evidence of curiosity, collaboration, and the emotions raised during these drama-production processes and puppetry operas. Eight students' quotations and quotations from one kindergarten teacher and one child are included in this paper.

### **2.3 Measures and methodology**

Based on the observations, photos, videos, and remarks of students participating in a pedagogical and experimental drama course as part of their university studies, we consider the value of puppetry and opera in fostering curiosity and thus creativity, and in raising emotions in collaborative ways when preparing the shows.

There is also consideration of the value of drama and literature studies in ECE. We have a new national curriculum in Finland (OPS 2018) in which art courses are allocated fewer hours per course, so it is necessary to take the value of different arts (fine arts, drama, crafts etc.) into account. There may be a long-lasting impact here when dealing with children's drama. One memorable play may be a starting point for a child to become interested in visiting libraries, museums, theatre performances, and other cultural sites, or an adult may encourage a child to create her/his own habits and practices of enjoying and creating art. Since very much

collaboration is involved in producing even a short show, this is something I examine in the paper with the aid of the students' writings/reflections.

### 3. Results and interpretation

#### 3.1 Realising the value of puppetry and collaboration

There appear to be immediate interactions, feelings, responses and emotions aroused with and towards the puppets during these short moments of drama and opera. When students are focusing on exploring how to be expressive with a puppet, there is an undoubted need for collaborative encounters during the process. At the end of a drama project, there may have been multiple combinations of collaboration: the students have listened to opera and arias on their own time, they have introduced opera to children, and they have read about opera, puppetry, and poems. They have chosen their own puppets with which they make a short performance, a combination of short arias, and combined this with the puppets of other puppeteers in the group. They have rehearsed the short "play" of puppetry opera, and they have felt what it is to have a real audience to watch their performance.

Curiosity is one aspect of *creativity*: thus, it is related to meaning of life (see creativity Kaufman 2018, 734) — the need of coherence, significance, "symbolic immortality" through creative activity — and hence to wellbeing. It is obvious in both groups that there is a fun and relaxed atmosphere: in ECE group at the university studies and among children in day care. In a group of 4–5-year-old children we performed a marionette ballet with the Pritney method. Girls and boys were prompted to play with these marionettes, and when they were concentrated on doing their dances with these marionet puppets they were accompanied by classical music. Children are standing on black velvet, which is the area of a ballroom, where Pritney's great dance ball is happening. On one occasion a boy called Pete approached me, thrilled with inspiration. "This is so fun. Look --. Cool", he said. This boy showed open enchantment and joy; his teacher then told me that this boy has serious developmental challenges and needs to be supervised a lot. The boy gently took a boy marionette in his hands and began to dance with the puppet. Creativity is a foundation for learning. When a child is playing with a puppet, this creates an energetic place in which purposeful action creates inquiry and debate among children and thus interaction and feelings — as in the case of Pete playing for the first time in his life with marionettes: he has feelings of joy and enhancement when playing together with other children, trying to be gentle and accurate with the puppet, which has a lot of strings, and to cope with its complicated mechanism to make the puppet produce movements. This is a great opportunity to practice many skills: focusing and concentrating, taking into account other marionet dancers with their puppeteers, learning about fine motor skills, about interactions and collaborations, discussing, listening to the music etc.

The students become very attached to their puppets; they are listening intensely the aria and trying to make the puppet's movements correspond to the music. The intense focus on what is happening during these few minutes fills them with emotions and inner symbolic pictures: feelings of beauty, strong feelings about sadness, sorrow, passion, joy – it seems that a puppet is alive and spreading its visions to the audience. The same "moment of wonder" is seen among the kindergarten children during the Pritney opera. Teachers call this "immediate enchantment". Puppets are depersonalised and ready to talk about any subjects. According to Astles (2012, 68) puppets can be radical in their discussions. In Pritney's pony opera, there is a song called "Little

Pony in Darkness.” On a small puppetry stage, a Pritney hand puppet is standing alone and looking lost. And there is a song that asks the question: what does a little pony alone in a parking lot in the darkness. The vision raises emotions and spreads a glimpse of sorrow to a child audience, and they wish that the pain would go away. And, of course we need a redemption from these moments when the lyrics come to their end. “Come home, pony, come home pony, don’t be sad and lonely”. And a puppet dog Turre arrives and asks: What are you doing alone here in the dark of night? Now it is time to go home. And they walk together, Turre and Pritney, and the child audience may see, hear and feel the power of a friendship. They also get a feeling of relief, that painful situations may be temporary. So, there is an aspect of mercy when this is performed with a puppet, like Pritney, who may be at the same time fragile and strong. In Schubert’s opera *Fierrabras* (Batta, 2001, 565), the music and the libretto are interpretations of hidden emotions, like longing, fear, and hope, which arise from the soul. The music drifts freely and tries to find a place to connect and become attached, and thus opening new dimensions from the inner self. There may appear unexpected tenderness, like in the case of Pritney’s pony opera. There is dark night, the moon is the only light, and there is an atmosphere of excitement. It is the scene of the pony’s feelings, like she is searching for something that she does not yet know. We have our imagination to fill in the parts of the story that are not directly explained, and this can be done with the aid of our complementary imaginary skills and by schemas (see Lintunen, 2001, 13).

Astles (2012, 69) emphasises that the puppet may embody the difficulties of different fears or restrictions we may have, and which the students may be going through. That is why a puppet may be the voice. When we are producing puppet shows, we are also making strong bonds within the community, as in the ECE students’ operas, or Pritney’s pony opera shows among children.

I would say that offering a combination of puppetry and music, like opera, to a child audience is radical. In day care it is not very common to hear even classical music, and our national curriculum states that we are obliged to offer opportunities for many artistic experiences to children (Curriculum 2018). The children in day care were enchanted of the short show: This wonder was seen in a scene of a few minutes’ length when Pritney’s pony opera had just begun. There was classical music from a CD, and the show was introduced to children by a big marionette bird. The bird encourages the audience to attend and focus on the feelings and thoughts of the pony, who was feeling a bit lost and alone, longing for the company of a friend. In Astles’ words (2012, 68) “there is an existing belief that puppets have their own life and soul and therefore, when they speak, they are not being spoken by the operator, but by some other force.” In the case of Cervantes’s *Don Quijote* (see Falla’s puppetry opera in Batta, 2001, 146–147) there is a scene in which Don Quijote sees a puppetry play and cannot separate the reality from the imagination, rushing onto the stage in the middle of the show. In the same manner, a child may believe in the magic of theatre. She/he may believe that puppets are talking, although she/he sees the puppeteer. Older children understand that it is the puppeteer who is speaking the words of a puppet, but at the same time the child is willing to believe in the magical and the imaginative (Lintunen, 2009). The reality of the theatre and the puppets is thus alive, at least during these short moments with the puppets.

The process of puppetry and opera creates learning opportunities for both the students and the child audiences. In university studies, the students need to visit libraries to search for information or to access stories. “I deepened my pedagogical knowledge by searching for more

literature to read by myself, so opera and puppetry were new to me.” (Student P, 2018) Students also searched for music. To find a suitable aria for their story, they need to listen to it and learn about it. They rehearsed by themselves at home, with one puppet, and rehearsed the combination of movement and the aria from the CD or Youtube. Some of them had rehearsed the dancing scene from Rameau’s opera *Les indes gallantes* with two finger puppets. One student had innovated an opera choir with tent finger puppets in her hands. Some students had focused on how the animal puppet uses its mouth to express the feelings of the queen of the night in Mozart’s opera *Die Zauberflöte*. The process of producing a small opera means concentrating on the important items in collaboration, and the students’ reflective feedback about the combination of puppetry and opera reveal their thoughts and feelings about this during their literary art and drama studies. This openness for new experiences and joy of finding “something totally new” can be seen in a student’s reflective writing: “Although opera is totally strange genre of music for me, it was awesome that the opera was included as a big part in this drama course. We had to work also at home to make our own experiments with the puppets and with this kind of classical music. I found the combination of puppets and opera music very funny and useful.” (Student E, 2018) It is apparent that puppets have been in the service of musical and literary programmes, like in the method of Pritney and the project called “Rinnalla – Hand in Hand” (2018–2020). This means that the puppets have been promoting language learning, writing skills (Astles 2012, 69) and musical experiments. In the Pritney method we encourage children to study emotions through dramatic play together with the puppets. One important aspect of this is learning alongside a puppet. Just like the Pritney pony does not know many things, but she is eager to learn – like doing ballet, playing football, reading books etc – she can also say that she does not understand, or she may get things wrong. The puppet is an example of how to express one’s feelings that you can try and try over again. And you don’t have to get it right on the first try.

During the process, both the students and the children may learn about themselves, about working in a group, and about drama and genres of children’s drama. Moreover, the adults, the ECE teachers and other staff in day care centre, also need to have the “freeing feeling” of creativity. When someone is all the time trying to instruct the child to “be quiet” or to “behave properly” during the show with Pritney, they need some guidance about what creativity is about. We need to loosen our ideas and concepts of so-called “good behaviour”. So, there needs to be an aspect of mercy, which is what the puppet offers the child, and which an adult may not have a clue about. A puppet may be at the same time both fragile and strong (Astles, 2012, 69), and the child is capable of realizing this. A child may also have the same feelings among adult people, who are trying to suppress the child’s desires or actions. The puppet may emphasize that it is embodied with the same feelings that the child is going through. That is why in Pritney’s pony opera, assessed in day care, children as an audience learn about emotions, about classical music, and about drama. The moment in the play when the learn about classical music can be surprising and joyful. They also learn about personal strengths and about the emotions raised during the opera and after the show. Both the students and the children in day care may share Zipes’ (2004) view of the importance of storytelling and creative drama among children. One student commented: “At the beginning I felt a bit suspicious about puppetry and opera. It appeared to be very pleasant. I definitely will try this combination among children.” (Student S, 2018) The value of opera, puppets and the stories told through them is a new way of learning through joy, excitement and emotions: “During the course my prejudices towards opera

diminished and I realized what great opportunities it offers with hand puppets.” (Student A, 2018).

Puppetry may offer opportunities to experience being someone else through the puppet character (Kroflin, 2012, p. 55). A child may be learning through experiences, emotions, incidents, characters, music and other elements of a play, and according to Gupta (2009), children’s collaboration with peers and adults produces shared thinking; as an interaction, this is qualitatively different from the thinking of an individual. A child may not be able to express all her/his feelings verbally, and puppet heroes help her/him to find the right words and another perspective (Majaron, 2012, p. 11), while the dramatic play or children’s puppet theatre is a learning and intellectual activity that incorporates dialogue and informal teaching. One kindergarten teacher’s spontaneous comment after Pritney’s mini-opera is clear on this: “Children were attached to this play from the very beginning, and they were just enchanted when the music begun. Also, children who are not very attentive in their verbal expression were attending with comments towards Pritney pony.” (ECE teacher, 2019). This teacher’s comment is a clear example of the power of drama. What is valuable in communication is that a child may have a possibility to reflect on what is happening during the show. A child may realize that something is happening on the stage that is similar to a familiar experience of his or hers. In a mini-show of Pritney’s opera assessed in a day care group of 4–5-year-old children, a pony expresses her feelings of being alone and missing a friend. This raises emotions and feelings of compassion and maybe even sadness.

Raising ethical and moral issues in the discussion is one major issue to consider when dealing with drama and stories for children. The stories and dramatizations offered to an audience are at the same time provoking both discussions and arguments. They offer possibilities for exploring many topics, and thus for enhancing children’s explanatory and reasoning skills (see Gupta, 2009, p. 1048). According to Majaron (2012, p. 11), art plays an important role in various aspects of a child’s development; this is especially true of puppetry, as it provides the child with a form of disguise to hide behind. It also allows for better contact with the child than the options available to preschool teachers or even parents. Here, Majaron’s ideas about three-level stylisation make sense: first, there is a stylised visual appearance (a costume, mask etc.); second, there are specific movements; and third, there are specific sounds. These aspects together create a symbolic form of communication and of transmitting messages.

“As an experience, the show was great. The process of the planning was nice, and it made our group cohesion solid. This is something special, that we have the opportunities to gain these kinds of experiences.” (Student J, 2018)

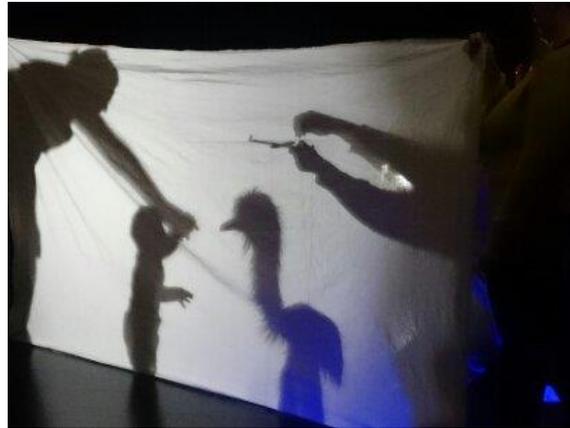
*Figure 1.* Students are puppeteering with finger paper puppets.



*Figure 2.* Students are puppeteering with rod puppets in opera.



*Figure 3.* Students are puppeteering with a big exotic marionette bird and using shadow theatre.



*Figure 4.* Students are puppeteering with stick puppets.



#### **4. Discussion**

In this study, I intended to investigate and offer views on how ECE students have experienced and formed perceptions regarding the puppetry and opera activities in their course, and how they have collaborated and succeeded when participating in these activities. I have also considered the possibilities of puppetry and opera offered by the Pritney method in day care settings. I have raised some thoughts about how students and children raise emotions when engaging with the expressive arts through opera and puppetry. I also discuss in the paper the benefits of puppets and children's drama in education, and specifically how learning through drama offers valuable possibilities for collaboration and emotional learning. A play is a medium

for communication and personal interaction with the audience and among students; the students' motivation is to prepare a play and achieve these related goals during the process. Summing this up is one particular citation from a student essay: "Puppetry and opera are striking! I got so thrilled and excited about the power of puppetry." (Student A, 2018).

Thus the artistic experiments created by puppetry and other performative art forms are valuable in transferring cultural heritage and creating aesthetic and pedagogical moments. When we are talking about educational goals, puppetry is successful, because the activity is fun and gives the sense of acceptance and the sense of relaxation. Puppetry has proven to involve transformative process and this may help us to better understand the world around us in our everyday lives when we are troubled with emotions. When Pritney arrives in the building, it seems like everything is okay, no matter what the issue or the situation is. And this is what matters to myself as puppeteer and the children as audience

## Conclusion

The research question was this: What are possibilities of the Pritney method in early childhood education for promoting collaboration, curiosity, and emotions through the combination of opera and puppetry?

I have examined the role of a puppet and have given examples of this among ECE students at the university level and among children in day care. I have assessed the value and possibilities of the Pritney method: what is possible to achieve with a puppet, and with the combination of puppetry and opera music. Short glimpses of activities and Pritney's pony opera are shown as an example. Student's reflections are shown through short references from their writings.

The study takes place in northern Finland, but the results can be duplicated in other regions of the world with a different puppet, so that the Pritney pony is like a prototype of any puppet. The combination of opera and puppetry may also offer its potential among geographically diverse populations. It would be great to have another study like this in another context – and this is something I am looking forward to. This kind of art-oriented research content would allow us to gain new ideas in the field of children's literary art practices and children's relations to animals, puppetry, and emotional experience through the art of opera. There should be more specialised examinations of the literary art and drama education in ECE, with special emphasis placed on *opera and puppetry* and the emotions and curiosity involved in these experiences. The results of this study need to be interpreted with caution due to the sample limitations and the number of inferences drawn, as only a few notions have been identified from the data. In addition, the survey sample was limited to ECE students in northern Finland, meaning only one geographical setting was included.

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