A Visit from Flap Jack: Advantages of Puppets in the Classroom

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Inquiry Conference
April 29, 2006
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I. ABSTRACT

Teaching in SCASD, I have benefited by having other adults in the room to assist me with monitoring classroom management and keeping students on task. I felt overwhelmed at the possibility of teaching by myself once I stepped out into the "real world." So I started introducing two puppets to the class to have another voice to support me. This inquiry has helped me discover the advantages of using a puppet in managing behavior, motivation, and even discussing difficult topics.
II. Background Information: Class Profile

**CLASSROOM PROFILE**

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My classroom is comprised of eighteen second-grade students. Eleven of them are boys and seven are girls ranging from ages seven and eight. I find it impressive that none of my students have an issue with the fact that there are a lot more boys than girls in the classroom. They all work together in partner or small group activities with seldom any complaints. One student is autistic and receives academic instruction in a separate classroom for students with autism. He is in my classroom during morning meeting, read aloud, lunch, recess, and some of the specials. The other students are very patient and kind with him, encouraging him to take walks or color with them. Three students are in the Title I reading program, a time which fosters their reading skills. They leave class every morning to receive additional individual support and instruction from a Title I reading specialist. There are about six academic leaders in my class posing as extra active participants. These students are also social leaders as well, often lending others a hand. The other students tend to model after them. There is currently one student who leaves at the end of everyday to the English Language Learners program for half an hour. She has been in the United States for almost a year now, learning English as a second language when she moved here. Her math skills are highly developed, and she is talkative with the rest of the class. She reads very well,
but her level of comprehension is questionable. About four to five students require constant behavioral management to handle common misbehavior problems. They display difficulty with listening, paying attention, following directions, working quietly, bullying, tattling, and sharing. Sometimes their behavior is intentional when they refuse to do work or join the group because they do not like somebody. A couple of behavior cards have been made to give those students the responsibility to self-manage their behavior and to be able to see that behavior visually recorded. One student recently started receiving emotional and behavioral support from a TSS. The TSS comes in everyday from 11:30-3:00. Overall, my class is a great group; they are usually very engaged and enthusiastic with school projects and lessons. My students are kind, generous, and helpful. I am very lucky to start off with such a eager collection of young individuals in a small, collaborative class size.

III. Coming Up With a Wondering

I have been really fortunate that I have three other adults in the classroom—a mentor teacher, a paraprofessional, and a TSS. Additionally, I had easy access to other interns, teachers, and teacher assistants in my primary wing hallway. I have been concerned that when I head out to the “real world,” I will be by myself. Then, how would I handle all that classroom management… by myself? I have never done it by myself. I have had my own classrooms before but there were always 1 or 2 other teachers team teaching with me.

I thought about the advantages of team teaching. How would adding another voice in the classroom help me out? It was not just about managing student behavior. I also wanted to improve the effort students put into their academic performance. With my concerns and fears about teaching a class by myself, I thought about what I could do alleviate those fears and prepare myself for the life after student teaching.

IV. Inspiration & Research (The Experts)

A week after I began contemplating about a wondering, I was inspired by a guest speaker at a PDS seminar session. George Dempsie, a classroom teacher at Ferguson Elementary School of SCASD,
shared his insights about the usage of puppets in his classroom. He showed various examples of his puppets, which addressed numerous issues. I left seminar inspired and excited. An idea was

I started reading Dempsie’s articles. The quote that really convinced me to use puppetry was when he wrote:

“...Using a classroom puppet is like team teaching. Children like the change of pace and variety that comes from using a puppet to introduce a lesson or help solve a classroom conflict. A puppet can add that special spark to motivate and capture the children’s attention that the ‘regular’ teacher can’t do” (Dempsie).

Nowadays, classrooms are increasingly diverse. They are not homogeneous anymore. There is an increasing amount of research revealing different needs of children, whether it be physical, cognitive, or behavioral. New ways of communication are added to the responsibilities of teachers. As I started researching, I came upon a website called “Teaching With Puppets.” It posed the following questions:

“How do you correct behavior in a group without bringing direct negative attention to a child? How do you repeat primary concepts without boring those who understand the concept, or making those who don't, feel stupid? How can you talk about delicate subjects in a comfortable, non-threatening manner? How can you introduce difficult concepts in a fun way? How can you bring warmth and humor and unity to a classroom of students who are so diverse? There are many ways to do these. But teaching with puppets is one of the easiest and most fun.”

My thoughts all seem to be on the same page as the author of the website. My interest in using a puppet was sparked even more. They also further provided tips on how to use a puppet.

V. Official Wondering

With the anxiety of going off on my own and teaching by myself, I came to the conclusion that I could use a puppet or two in my own class and have this opportunity as practice. I wanted to know if I could pull it off in the future.

*Will bringing a puppet into the classroom improve student behavior, effort, and academic performance?* And secondly, would I be able to pull this off as a primary teacher?

VI. The Plan
To answer my inquiry question, I planned to use the puppet in several ways. I intended to use it to motivate student participation in various areas as well as good behaviors. These good behaviors were expectations formulated by the class and teachers—sitting quietly on the rug, raising hands to ask questions, being patient with others, cooperating with partners/small groups, following directions, and so on. This was in hopes that the letters from the puppet (commending on observed good behavior) would motivate the students to work harder at doing their personal best. The puppet also interacted with a couple of students at a time during recess while the students “helped the puppet learn” how to write, spell, and do math. I planned this method with the hope of improving the students’ academic confidence and performance.

I also wanted to use puppets in role-playing scenarios with children. According to Denise Özdeniz’s article “Puppets in Primary,” “puppets introduce another proficient English speaker into the classroom for the teacher to speak to. This is important, as one natural language learning strategy adopted by children is that of observing and then imitating conversations conducted by the people around them.” At this age in development during primary elementary grades, I agreed that modeling after the teacher was a significant strategy to further touch upon various topics.

VII. New Questions

While I successfully used Flap Jack, our class puppet, during Morning Meeting and recess, I wanted to use it more during academic times of the day. I also noticed that student interaction changed since the arrival of the puppet. Soon sub-questions formed in addition to my original wondering.

Would it be too disruptive if I brought out Flap Jack during instructional times of the day?

As time went on, my wondering started to evolve from observing reactions for academic purposes to social relationships within the classroom.

How does the use of a puppet assist a student in socialization and acceptance with his classmates?

VIII. Data Collection & Analysis
I had various sources of data, including observations that I have documented in my weekly journal (anecdotal notes), photographs, student letters to the puppets, student contributions to weekly newsletters about the puppets, evaluations from my mentor teacher and internship advisor, and of course, research. A lot of my research came from articles by George Dempsie documenting his experiences on the usage of puppets in his classroom and other articles that I found online (listed on the works cited page).

The majority of data consisted of anecdotal notes documenting students’ behavior, responses to the puppet, academic performance, and peer interactions. Student artifacts were also collected to show their responses to puppets in the classroom. The saying is true: “A picture is worth a thousand words!” I photographed often in my classroom, capturing images of student expressions that cannot be justified in just words. My mentor teacher and I took photographs when I had a puppet out and I saved them as evidence of their interaction with the puppets. There was also a bag overloaded with letters and Valentines from students writing to Flap Jack. I collected these artifacts as evidence that my students are responding to this new personality in the classroom.

In analyzing my data, I was able to determine if a particular student was responding positively or negatively to my puppets. Flap Jack’s filled mailbox was ample evidence that students were enjoying their interactions with the puppet. When students eagerly insisted on Flap Jack coming out to talk at the rug or play outside at recess, I was convinced that he had a positive effect on the classroom. Every time I
noticed that the students were talking about the puppets, I quickly typed those moments down in my journal via anecdotal notes. As I typed up those interactions and conversations, I also reflected upon their responses to myself, with my mentor teacher, internship advisor, guidance counselor, and other faculty members.

IX. Claim & Evidence #1

*Children are open to someone with whom they identify.*

When I bought a puppet, a furry monkey with the name Flap Jack on its tag, I was curious about what kind of voice and personality to give it. After reading, Mr. Dempsie’s article, “Using Puppets in a Primary Classroom: A Teacher-Researcher’s Findings,” I felt inspired to make Flap Jack a new student joining my second grade class.

“I chose Hilda because I thought that the children could identify with her. Children see themselves in puppetry and the puppets can often represent their hopes and fears (Currant, 1985). I also realized that Hilda possessed a unique feature that would make her valuable to both the children and me: she was not the teacher. She could be silly; she could be stupid (and let the students tutor her); and she could be their equal—an understanding friend. I hoped that she would help open the avenue of communication between students and myself (Fleming, 1983).”

~~ George Dempsie

I did not want to abruptly bring in a puppet. Therefore, I planned a way to transition a new personality into the classroom. I spent two morning meetings reading a letter from the puppet, Flap Jack. I found cute stationary from my mentor teacher, wrote a messy note with my left hand (I am right-handed), and sealed each letter in an envelope. The following are the letters I shared with my students (also can be found in Appendix A).

Feb. 2, 2006: First letter to kids:
Dear Ms. Yap,

I am writing to you because I am moving. I’m looking for a new place to live and I heard that you have a lovely class of wonderful 2nd graders. I’m in 2nd grade, too. Do you think they’ll want me to come? I’m very shy.

From,

F.J.

Feb. 3, 2006
Dear Ms. Yap,

I am moving today! I should be at Park Forest Elementary School next week. I cannot wait to meet your class. Is it cold in Pennsylvania right now? It’s very, very, very hot from where I am. I live right by the beach and I love swimming. I hope your class likes me.
From,
F.J.

Their responses were what I hoped for and more. They truly believed a new student was coming the next week. I made sure I signed the letters from F.J. instead of Flap Jack because I felt F.J. was more believable as a child’s name. The following were reactions that I documented in my student teaching journal (Appendix C):

- Students kept calling out questions
- Interested to know what F.J. stands for
- Students volunteering for new kid to sit next to them
- Students curious to know when he’s arriving and where he’s from
- Students eager to know if F.J. is a boy or girl. I said boy and most of the boys were excited about having a new boy and some of the girls were shouting, “We want a girl!” I said that I’ll ask F.J. if he knows any girls who are moving (soon to be the raccoon puppet)
- Student: “Is he smart?”
  Me: “Does it matter if he’s smart or not?”
  Student + others: “Noooo!”
- A student comes to my desk later in the day at 12:05 P.M.:
  Student: “I wish F.J. could come here Friday (versus next week). I wish he was here now!

The day of FJ’s first arrival to my class, students were still eager to meet the new student. The following were notes documented from student exclamations and interactions as they arrived at school.

8:35 A.M.
- I’m walking down the hallway back to my classroom (from the teacher’s lounge)
- Student: “Where’s FJ?? Is he coming today??”
- I hear them all discussing about where’s FJ while they’re arriving in the hallway
- 8:45
- Student: “When’s FJ coming?”
- Another student asked me the same question. I told him he will be coming after morning meeting. He puts FJ’s name on the whiteboard next to the schedule.
- Student: “I hope FJ sits next to me!”

8:53
- Kids are too excited talking about the Super Bowl, their weekend, & FJ. Majority of them not writing in morning journals (they’re supposed to!).

9:05 Morning Meeting—introducing Flap Jack
- Me: “Have you seen this house here yet?” I walked over to the puppet house that I snuck over to the window ledge while students were busy greeting each other during Morning Meeting. I knocked on the house a couple of times. Students automatically gathered at the edge of the carpet out of their circle formation to see.

9:36
- During independent practice for spelling, B came up to me at my table. “Did FJ see us doing anything bad yet?” I responded, “No, he usually catches students when they’re good.”

Math & Snack Time
• M: “Can FJ come out? I think he’ll like this.”
• Referred to the puppet as a separate personality
• 10 minutes later I sat down with his group again and he complained that FJ is just a puppet. “How can he see us? He’s just a puppet.” He seems skeptical; I’m going to keep an eye on his responses to Flap Jack. His comments seem to be contradictory.
• [C]: “Is FJ hungry? We’re having snack now.”
• Me: “Are there any leftover apples?” 10 minutes later. [Cl]: “There are 3 apples leftover, but I don’t know if everyone got apples or not.” 10 minutes later. “I think everyone who wanted one got one.” 1 minute later. “Can I just give one to FJ?”
• [Sh]: “Tomorrow, you can take FJ out of his cage & I can teach him how to write tomorrow.”
• [Mh]: “Why does Flap Jack have a mailbox?” Mrs. Humphrey: “That’s because you can write him letters.” Mariah: “ooh, I want to have a letter!” [Br]: “I want to write him a letter.”
• [M]: “Can FJ come out? I want to ask him some questions.” Me: “I thought you told me he was just a puppet… You still want to ask him some questions?” Mark: “Yeah.”
• [J]: “Can I send Flap Jack one of my Zoo Books to read?

10:53
• [S]: “Flap Jack got a lot of mail!! He better come out so he can read all of them.”
• [H]: “Ms. Yap, Ms. Yap! You should check his mailbox to see if anybody wrote anything bad about him!”
• The mailbox is loaded with mail, books, and even an apple!

11:00- L.A. Centers
• [Mh], [G], & [Br]: “Can you bring him out? I think every time we have Word Station, FJ should join us.” Me: “I’ll think about it. If you think he’s just a puppet, then why do you want him out?” Them: “Because he’s funny! And cute. And cuddly.”
• [B]: “When will Flap Jack come out again?”
• Me: “When it’s quiet enough in this room. He’s really shy, remember?” [Cl] started talking and [B] shushed him.

12:08
• I saw [Br] peaking into the puppet house. “Will FJ ever come out?”
• Me: “I think it’s a little too loud right now.”
• [Br]: “Be quiet or FJ won’t come out.”
• [B]: “You guys! Be quiet so FJ can come out!”

12:50-1:10: Outdoor-Indoor recess
• [C] whispered to FJ’s ear: “If you’re ever scared, we’re here for you.”
The next week, several students brought their own puppets and houses or mailboxes for their puppets. We shared them during morning meeting with my puppet and their puppets, introducing each other around the circle.

X. Claim & Evidence #2

*Confidence and caring for others increase as children express their strengths.*

I started using Flap Jack during a fifteen minute slot of time in the morning. The concept of time is important in second grade. I had Flap Jack express silly misconceptions about time, making sure he was saying a lot of wrong statements on purpose. “Nooo! *Flap Jack!*” Students were squealing with laughter as they corrected the puppet.

Flap Jack also had really sloppy handwriting. Many of his letters are also often written backwards. I wanted to address this with specific students in mind who have the same problem with their writing and spelling. These letters that showed students wanting to help Flap Jack can be found in Appendix E.
• Dear [Sh],
  I saw you working really hard at spelling. I wish I can write as well. Ms. Yap said I need to work on my letters. Maybe you can help me.
  From,
  Flap Jack

  One girl said to me, “Tomorrow, you can take FJ out of his cage & I can teach him how to write tomorrow.” Another student shared her letter from FJ with me. She was beaming. [Sh] brought it over and we read it together.

  [Sh]: “Wow, this is really sloppy.”
  Me: “Haha, yeah. Flap Jack needs to work on his handwriting.” After reading the letter out loud with her, I say: “Can you help Flap Jack?”
  [Sh]: “Yeah, his letters are backwards! I can help him now!”

  Later that day, the two girls, both in remedial reading support (Title I) approached me.

  [Sh]: “Can Flap Jack come out during recess? I want to teach him how to write.” [H]: “Yeah! I want to show him how the chimes ring to be a false alarm.”
  Me: “What did you want to teach Flap Jack again?”
  [H]: “Read, write, and color because I saw his handwriting and he’s not very good.”

  On the very first day that Flap Jack arrived, about a third of my students gathered around Flap Jack and tried to teach him how to write his letters during indoor recess. Then [S] and [B] wanted to show Flap Jack how to write suffixes. The students kept telling him what suffixes are and that they’re learning that in class this week.

  XI. Claim & Evidence #3

  *Children use the appeal of puppets to interact with each other.*
“The universal appeal and survival of puppets lies in the human need to overcome crisis through illusion; to turn dreams into reality; to create life; to visualize feelings and ideas, and feel the power of creating life (Kruger, Dr. M.S.).”

I discovered an unexpected reaction to the first puppet, Flap Jack. The student who gave the most skeptical response to the puppet’s arrival became the most attached to it. The next day he brought his own puppet, Jack, and introduced it during morning meeting. He read aloud a letter from Jack. The other teachers and I have been having trouble with this particular student. He has trouble listening (and thus, respecting) to more than one authority figure in the classroom. He also has weak or no relationships with his classmates. He has bullied and excluded many peers in both free play and collaborative school activities. I came to the conclusion that this student—I will call him Student [M]—became extremely attached to FJ because the puppet would not judge him back. His closeness to Flap Jack also built his relationship with me, another figure of authority in the classroom, through communicating with the puppet.

- [M] has claimed Flap Jack, the puppet, to be his “best, best, best friend.” This came as quite a change compared to his initial reaction to the puppet this morning. Now he constantly writes letters to FJ, hugs & kisses him, and tells his classmates about his new best friend.
- The next morning, he brought his mother in to meet Flap Jack. He made a huge letter to FJ written on Styrofoam poster board. [M] even brought his own puppet, Jack. He created a mailbox for Jack, just like Flap Jack, and shared Jack and a letter from Jack during Morning Meeting, saying that pancakes were the puppet’s favorite food, too (just like Flap Jack’s). As this peculiar obsession with the puppet continued, my mentor teacher and I discussed [M]’s close link to the puppet. We concluded that the puppet is considered a “non-threat” in the classroom because [M] can behave any way with the puppet and he will not “talk back.” Additionally, the students know that Flap Jack needs help with his writing and math. This enabled [M] to feel superior to the puppet because it gives him more control over who is smarter. I must figure a way to space the two away from each other because it is getting annoying hearing about FJ from [M]. The puppet is “safe” for [M] as he is showing effort in getting to know more about Flap Jack by asking him questions in his letters to the puppet, but [M] must also learn to socialize with his peers in an appropriate manner.

February 7, 2006. [M]’s creation of his own puppet’s mailbox brought more attention to his friend-making skills. He showed Jack to his classmates and they immediately started to write it letters. [M] knew the drill with the letters: you wrote a letter to the puppet with questions and/or comments, and the puppet wrote you back. It seemed to me that [M] was communicating through his puppet, a behavior
that was a “safe” way for him to make friends with his classmates, which I found intriguing. This definitely turned the inquiry around. [M]’s behavior had drawn my attention from my use of puppets to his use of puppets for socializing with his peers.

During indoor recess of the same day, I saw [M] and two other classmates sitting together at a table. Those same two girls had tried to help my puppet learn how to write and spell. Now I saw them doing something similar with [M] and his puppet—a bonding experience for [M] and his peers.

One day I caught the guidance counselor in the hallway. I told her about [M]’s reaction to the puppet and she was ecstatic. She conjectured that his closeness to my puppet was creating a bond between him and me. This was a student whom he respects one authority figure at a time. After my talk with the guidance counselor, I did notice that [M] came to me voluntarily to tell me stories of shows he saw on T.V. Twenty minutes later, I saw [M] writing a letter from his own puppet, putting a pencil in the puppet’s hands to write the letter. Then he put the letter into another student’s puppet’s mailbox. [M] was starting to socialize more with his peers. A few weeks later, [M] brought in a newsletter that he had made himself that he passed out in class. There was a section that read:

“GOOD JOB MS. YAP FOR WINNING TEACHER OF THE WEEK. Ms. Yap won teacher of the week because she was good all week. That is what you do to be teacher of the week” (original copy included in the Appendix).

Seeing that made me happy that this was concrete evidence of [M]’s relationship with me strengthening.

On the morning of March 29, weeks after I had brought Flap Jack in, [M] approached me. I have also documented this encounter in my journal, which is included in the Appendix.

Wednesday, March 29, 2006.
[M] asks me how I made the stationary for Flap Jack and Colette. I explained to him that I had drawn a picture first, cut it out, and then paste it onto lined paper. He continues to ask, fully interested, about how I put it into the computer to print copies. I explained that after I cut out the picture and pasted onto the lined paper, I made photocopies. “Ohhhh! Okay!”

The very next morning, [M] hurried over to me. “Look!!” In his hands was his own puppet stationary for Mr. Hairy. His parents ran a copying store and M had used those resources to make that stationary. He had really listened to how I made mine and had done the same with his own drawing. Later that same
day, I saw that paper on another boy’s desk. [M] had written him a letter. Earlier in the year when there were many circumstances where [M] had not gotten along with his classmates, my mentor teacher sat down and had a talk with [M] about friends. [M] revealed that he only respected one other peer, that very same boy who had received a letter from Mr. Hairy. The choice of words [M] used in the letter was incredibly similar to how I wrote from Flap Jack. In the Appendix, I have attached a photocopy of that letter used as evidence to support this second claim. It read:

Dear [G],

I saw you in the morning. You were working real hard. I hope you can keep it up very much.

Love,
Mr. Hairy.

During recess, I noticed that the majority of the students play with their own classmates. There are usually about four classes outside at a time around the same grade level. Whenever I brought Flap Jack out, [M] would instantly follow me and sit down on a rock or bench with me. He would jump up and down, show Flap Jack new dances, and chat. He ended up spending his entire recess times with Flap Jack and me. Students from other classes caught a glimpse of the puppet and would start wandering over in a curious and shy manner. Soon a small crowd formed where I would have children from about three different classes giggling with each other to Flap Jack’s silliness. Sometimes a game of charades would break out and we would play with each other. I noticed that children who normally would not voluntarily interact with each other would be playing the game together with the common interest of liking Flap Jack’s presence. Even other interns talking with their students would sometimes bring them over and say hi to Flap Jack and ask questions. I find this time at recess as a beneficial bonding moment strengthening relationships with peers (in the same class and in different classes together) and with me.

XII. Claim & Evidence #4

Puppets can be used to address expectations as a classroom management tool.
It is a common sight to see children running down the hallway. “Walk!” can always be heard shouted by adults standing in doorways. I got the idea from Mr. Dempsie’s presentation at the PDS seminar about addressing the expectation to walk indoors. Out of construction paper, I created a bandage and an arm sling. At Morning Meeting, I pulled the “injured” puppet out of the house and students gasped. They asked what happened to Flap Jack. I noticed many alarmed and concern expressions. Flap Jack explained to the students that he had hurt himself when he was running down the hallway. He jumped over a jacket and tripped on a book bag. Students called out more questions. “Why were you running?” Flap Jack responded that he was in a hurry to be first in line. I noticed some children shaking their heads with clicking their tongues “tsk, tsk.” One girl raised her hand.

“Flap Jack. You don’t need to run. You shouldn’t run in the hallway. You know that.”
“Well, how about here in the classroom?”
“No! You could trip over a chair or a desk!”
“Well, I was in a rush. I really wanted to be first in line.”
“Nooo! It doesn’t matter, Flap Jack! We’re all going to the same place!”

Later that day, Flap Jack received a letter from a student that read: “Dear FJ, I hope you don’t have an ache in your neck/head anymore.”

Here was another example of using a puppet as a tool for classroom management including trying to motivate students to behave better.
Dear [Cl],

Wow. You sat so still at math. I wish I can sit as quietly. I liked how you raised your hand. I hope your 181 friends can sit as nicely on the rug as you.

From,

Flap Jack

The students sitting at this student’s desk set were excited to see what Flap Jack wrote. I watched Clayton beam while he showed his letter to his peers. They congratulated him.

Dear [B],

Wow, you know all about your suffixes! I heard you say “You drop the E and add –ING.” Cool, I did not know that. You must be very smart. Maybe you can help me out some time with prefixes and suffixes. I get them mixed up with compound words.

From,

Flap Jack

Dear [Th],

I saw you work so quietly at the word table. Your other friends were talking next to you but you stayed focus on your paper. Nice!

From,

Flap Jack

Dear [H],

Ms. Yap told me that you did more work during your recess time to finish up on your own. You must really like writing! You have a good attitude.

From,

Flap Jack

Dear [T],

I saw you sitting very quietly at the word station. You must work very hard. I wish I can sit still as quietly as you can. Sometimes I talk too much. Hope you’re having a nice morning.

From,

Flap Jack

XIII. Claim & Evidence #5

Children Are Comfortable Sharing With a “Safe” Confidante

“The puppet is a visual metaphor, representing ‘the real life,’ but at the same time, it is one step removed from the real world. Puppetry can be used to break down racial, social and political barriers and stereotypes, because it represents the “neutral” aspect of the human, exaggerating its larger than life issues. Puppets can say more than the live actor. Puppet can get away with being highly controversial and thus often say more than would be possible for a live actor to say” (Kruger, Dr. M.S.).

I have been wanting to address the issue of prejudice, racism, bullying, and diversity with my students. I did not know how to approach the subject. My advisor suggested that I bring up these more serious issues through a puppet. I decided that I can use the second puppet I have, Colette. Her personality is more mature and smarter than Flap Jack. I decided to start a new project through Colette
about embracing diversity. I started a time in our class schedule called “A Talk with Colette.” I had Colette explain to the students that she used to write an advice column back where she came from. People wrote her letters and she wrote back with some advice. Colette read a letter she had received with my students. I wrote a fake letter pretending that someone was having a problem with bullying. I wanted the students to write letters to Colette about similar topics—anything they had questions about, if they saw something happening to someone, or a personal experience. (I had students write letters to Colette the next morning and then shared three at “A Talk with Colette” anonymously and held a discussion with what advice they could give this person.) I found the letters to be quite personal about previous experiences of being bullied, a question about what happens if someone does not listen to your I-message, etc. The students’ communication with Colette caused me to realize that these students felt safe confiding with a puppet. They knew that I was behind all the letters of both puppets, but it was different. They were not sharing secrets with a teacher; they were talking to a friend.

XIV. Conclusion

At the end of my inquiry project, I passed out a survey to my students (blank sample in the Appendix). They were to circle a smiley face that had a grin, a flat mouth, or a frown. I explained to my students what each smiley means. The following are the questions posed on the survey:

Q1. How did you feel when you first learned that FJ was coming to the class?
Q2. How did you feel when you found out that FJ was a puppet?
Q3. How did you feel about getting a letter from FJ?
Q4. How did you feel about writing a letter to FJ?
Q5. How did you feel about FJ coming out during recess?
Q6. How did you feel about FJ talking about time?
Q7. How did you feel about talking about different cultures with Colette?
Q8. How did you feel about Flap Jack?
Q9. How did you feel about Colette?
As one can see, the graph shows the results of the vast majority of my students enjoying the interaction with the puppets. I came to see that I could pull off the use of a puppet. I also noticed that the less frequent I involve a puppet in the classroom, the less letters and comments I received from my students about the puppets. I had trouble with the consistency of bringing the puppet into the classroom on a recurrent timeline. There was definitely a positive relationship between the frequency of the puppet’s presence and the frequency of students’ “fan mail.”

I also sent open-ended surveys to my mentor teacher, internship advisor, and classroom paraprofessional. My mentor teacher and I talked about suggestions she had written in the survey for further practice with puppets in our final reflection. Students had brought in puppets and stuffed animals to be kept in the classroom. At first I was excited that they wanted to join in with their enthusiasm for puppets, but my mentor teacher and I agree that next time, I should just allow one designated time for students to bring those in because it ended up taking attention away from my own puppet.

XV. New Wonderings
Originally, when I researched about puppets, I found a lot of resources on how to use them in preschool. Now that I have a sense of how seven and eight year olds react to a puppet, I am wondering what is that invisible wall where students are too old for a puppet. Or is there no age limit?

I introduced Flap Jack at the end of January. Then I brought Colette to the classroom midway through March. At that January seminar, Mr. Dempsie showed us multitudes of puppets used for various objectives. How early in the year should I bring in a puppet? How many should I use?

XVI. What Does the Future Hold?

Since I had intended to use a puppet for academic purposes but it turned into following social responses, I would still like to discover new ways of using a puppet in the future. The list below was taken from an article about a pilot project using puppets to promote engagement during science lessons.

The following were results of how a puppet improved students’ reasoning skills. I found these results fascinating and would like to experiment in similar projects in the near future.

- “There was an increase in the children’s use of argumentation and a decrease in their use of recall responses in the puppets lessons. There were more opportunities for children to develop their thinking about science in puppets lessons.
- There was an increase in the time that children used talk involving reasoning and a decrease in the time that they talked about practical and procedural matters in the puppets lessons. There were more opportunities for children to develop their thinking about science in puppets lessons.
- There was an increase in the teachers’ use of reasoning questions and a decrease in their use of non-reasoning questions in the puppets lessons. The teachers’ questioning style created more opportunities for thinking in the puppets lessons.
- There was an increase in the teachers’ use of argumentation and a decrease in the extent to which they gave information to children in the puppets lessons. The teachers’ interaction with the children created more opportunities for engagement and thinking in the puppets lessons. Most of this increase is attributed to argumentation generated by the puppets.
- There was an increase in the teachers’ use of story and narrative and an increase in the extent to which teachers offered encouragement when puppets were used. Both of these changes in teacher behaviour generated a more positive environment for learning in science lessons” (The Puppets Project...
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APPENDIX A
Dear Ms. Yap,

I am writing to you because I am moving. I'm looking for a new place to live and I've heard about a lovely class. Do you think your class will want me to come? I'm very shy.

From,

[Signature]
Dear Ms. Yap,

I am moving today! I should be at Park Forest Elementary School next week. I cannot wait to meet your class.

Is it cold in Pennsylvania right now? It's very very very hot here. Where I am, I live by the beach. Do you? I hope your class likes me.

E.O.
APPENDIX B
APPENDIX C
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blake</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brennan</td>
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<td>Byron</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cameron</td>
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<td>Clara</td>
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<td>Claylan</td>
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<td>Gehrig</td>
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<td>Sofia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theresa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Notes to FJ:*
- Wrote to FJ
- Received from FJ
- Puppet wrote to FJ

*Comments:*
I think of myself a sympathetic person, which is why I find my heart reaching out to my students as a passion in school. If I had to pick a passion (according to the several passions we read in chapter 2 of *The Reflective Educator’s Guide to Classroom Research*—Dana & Yendol-Silva), I would choose passion 1: helping an individual child.

There are a few individuals in my class that stick out, as they acquire more of my attention. I considered one or two of them to base my inquiry project on, but decided that there were too many outside factors involved that attributed to the student’s behavior and academic performance. I decided to narrow in on one particular student, “C,” who my mentor teacher identified as a low achiever. He is the average student, but he is not producing average work. This child sits at his desk, plays with his pencils, scissors, or pieces of paper with his hands inside the desk. Basically, he does everything but what he is supposed to be doing.

I’ve found myself reminding him to get back to work frequently throughout every task, for he’ll pick up his pencil when I talk to him, and then when I walk away, he’ll be distracted again. He is a very pleasant student, very social with his peers. He is patient with all the students in group activities, but he does not do his work. That is the most frustrating of all—to have to always sit down right next to him and watch him do the assignment because if I walk away and come back, there will still be a blank paper in front of him.

The one time I was really excited with C was when I taught him a different way to solve number sentences by using number strings. He usually drew little circles and then counted and crossed some out. So sat down and one-on-one worked out the number string strategy with him. I was patient for the allotted time and encouraged him to build upon that for “today’s number” and other math sessions. Then C got really into the math period and tried to write as many number sentences as he could; it become a competitive activity where he showed off to his peers at his set of desks of how many number sentences he had so far. He kept going after math time ended. And the next time he found that paper in his desk, he added more to it. That day, I brought him to my desk and I put a smiley sticker on the paper telling him how proud I was of how much effort and enthusiasm he put into math. He was so excited about the sticker that he showed his peers with such pride on his face.

Last semester I started a behavior card with another individual with the parts of the day divided. I would draw smiley faces or Xs under each subject listed. Today I made something similar for another student. I personalized it with a cropped photograph of him sitting at his desk writing. I want the “good student report” paper to be motivating and personal with that picture. At the last second, I looked for a picture of C from my computer files and printed out a form for him, too. I’m hoping to start that with him as well to encourage him to visually see how many (or little) smileys or stickers he EARNS for staying on task and putting effort into his work.

My mentor teacher and I have been discussing about C’s performance often. We wonder whether he simply did not listen and that is why he does not know what he supposed to do at his desk or that he did not understand the directions. We find ourselves always reteaching the whole lesson at his desk, which is frustrating. To frequently summarize and remind him to stay on task is daunting, and it is a recurring chore.

I think this is the start of an interesting inquiry. I guarantee it would be helpful to more than one student. I could see this expanding to at least 3 kids in your room and that would provide you with plenty of data. I also think you’ll see plenty of students just like this in your future classrooms. A study such as this will give you some great data for the lovely students to come. — Bill
I'm really lucky that I have 2 other adults (and a bunch sharing the same hall with me). I've been concerned that when I head out to the "real world," I will be by myself. Then what would I do with all that classroom management... by myself? I've never done it by myself. I've had my own classrooms before but there were always 1 or 2 other teachers team teaching with me.

Team teaching. I think that adding another voice in the classroom would help me out a lot. And it's not just managing student behavior. I also want to improve the effort students put into their academic performance.

Wondering: How would bringing a puppet into the classroom improve student behavior and student effort put into their academic performance?

I've been attempting to keep track of how many times I (or another adult) have to call on students to refocus and get back to their tasks. I'm hoping to use that as data to compare whether those numbers drop down when I add in an additional personality into the classroom.

I was thinking of transitioning the puppet into the class by bringing in "postcards" and "letters" from the puppet (I'm going shopping after school today for a puppet!). I will share them during Morning Meeting. The letters would say that s/he is planning to visit me but is very shy. S/he hopes the other students will like him/her and that s/he likes quiet places. Then I'm going to observe & record my students' response. I'm going to ask my parents to mail me a mini tape recorder from home to use.

Other ideas include:

- Managing behavior by creating scenarios
  - Students: Calling out, interrupting, loud talking
    - Puppet visits wearing ear muffs or very, very shy because the room is so loud that she is intimidated & scared
  - Students: moving out of seats often (getting up when they're not supposed to)

- Puppet visits wearing sunglasses complaining that she is dizzy & has a headache because everyone's moving so fast so often
- Reward students for good behavior
  - Puppet "writes" letters to students complimenting them
    - Create a mailbox for puppet if students want to write to puppet
    - Maybe create mailboxes for students?
- Motivating improvement on academic performance
  - Puppet "writes" letters to my students who mixes up their "b, d, p, g" to help him/her correct his/her letters & spellings
  - Puppet "writes" letters commending personal best & effort

I hate to admit it, but it sounds like you have a great start on your inquiry project. I'll actually be interested in the boys' reaction to the puppets. The girls will probably be very natural. I know you are thinking about an animal rather than a person. Think carefully about the type of animal that you go with. You don't want something too cute, but it does need to be something boys and girls can relate to. The activities seem fine and I'm sure you will find many more as you do research. Entire books have been written on the topic. — Bill
Exploring habitats
• Add ferns to the side of the puppet’s house
• Where do you think this puppet must live near?

Exploring diversity
• Show postcards from puppet’s travels

Interpreting information
• Puppet shows up with a scarf around neck with no voice
• Students must interpret clues to what he wants to say

Word study
• Write letters to students talking about how he struggles to identify contractions. Have students help him put together words in his letters to make contractions.

Handwriting
• Flapjack needs to work on his handwriting—neatness & spelling.

I bought new puppets! I can maneuver both their arms to make it look like they’re covering their eyes and ears, which is what I was planning to do. One is a monkey called Flapjack and the other is a raccoon hiding in a trashcan.

Transition:
• Feb. 2, 2006: First letter to kids:
  o Dear Ms. Yap,
    ▪ I am writing to you because I am moving. I’m looking for a new place to live and I heard that you have a lovely class of wonderful 2nd graders. I’m in 2nd grade, too. Do you think they’ll want me to come? I’m very shy.
    ▪ From,
      • F.J.
  o Gumball machine stationary sealed in envelope
  o Written with my left hand (I’m a righty)
• Feb. 3, 2006
  o Dear Ms. Yap,
    ▪ I am moving today! I should be at Park Forest Elementary School next week. I cannot wait to meet your class. Is it cold in Pennsylvania right now? It’s very, very, very hot from where I am. I live right by the beach and I love swimming. I hope your class likes me.
    ▪ From,
      • F.J.
  o Fish snorkeling stationary sealed in envelope

First, you are in a great situation with all the extra hands in the school. You probably won’t have that next year, but you will be fine. As far as all the puppet info, it really is shaping up nicely. It certainly helps that Cathy is so supportive. All kidding aside, I really do want to see this plan in action I want to be proven wrong about puppets. – Bill
Reactions to me sharing the 1st letter from FlapJack during morning meeting
- students kept calling out questions
  - interested to know what F.J. stands for
- students volunteering for new kid to sit next to them
- students curious to know when he’s arriving and where he’s from
- students eager to know if F.J. is a boy or girl
  - I said boy and most of the boys were excited about having a new boy and some of the girls were shouting, we want a girl!
  - I said that I’ll ask F.J. if he knows any girls who are moving (soon to be the raccoon puppet)
- 12:05: Theresa: “I wish F.J. could come here Friday (versus next week). I wish he was here now!”

Managing classroom behavior
- Personal space
  - Create scenarios

Enhancing student’s self concept
- Puppet is very shy. Speaks very quietly (like another student in my class). Have that student try to interpret for puppet and speak loudly for class.

Building community

8:35
- I’m walking down the hallway back to my classroom (from the teacher’s lounge)
- Sophia: “Where’s FJ??? Is he coming today??
- I hear them all discussing about where’s FJ while they’re arriving in the hallway

8:45
- Jacob: “When’s FJ coming?”
- Blake comes up to me and asks me. He puts FJ’s name on the whiteboard next to the schedule.
- Jacob: “I hope FJ sits next to me!”

8:53
- Kids are too excited talking about the Super Bowl, their weekend, & FJ. Majority of them not writing in morning journals (they’re supposed to!).

9:05
- Morning Meeting—introducing Flap Jack
- Me: “Have you seen this house here yet?” I walked over to the puppet house that I snuck over to the window ledge while students were busy greeting each other during Morning Meeting. I knocked on the
house a couple of times. Students automatically gathered at the edge of the carpet out of their circle formation to see.

9:36
• During independent practice for spelling, Blake came up to me at my table. “Did FJ see us doing anything bad yet?” I responded, “No, he only catches students when they’re good.”

9:50
• Dear Shannon,
  o I saw you working really hard at spelling. I wish I can write as well. Ms. Yap said I need to work on my letters. Maybe you can help me.
    ▪ From,
      ▪ Flap Jack
• Dear Clayton,
  o Wow. You sat so still at math. I wish I can sit as quietly. I liked how you raised your hand. I hope your 181 friends can sit as nicely on the rug as you.
    ▪ From,
      ▪ Flap Jack

10:05
• Shannon & Clayton found letters from Flap Jack on their desks. They were ecstatic—jumped up & down; smiled; showed their friends.

10:17
• Students are broken up into groups at math:
  o Mark: “Can FJ come out? I think he’ll like this.”
    ▪ Referred to the puppet as a separate personality
  o 10 minutes later I sat down with his group again and he complained that FJ is just a puppet. “How can he see us? He’s just a puppet.” Skeptical; I’m going to keep an eye on his responses to Flap Jack. His comments seem to be contradictory.

10:24
• Problem: Mark: “How come I get stuck with people I don’t like? Nobody ever takes my ideas.”
• Problem: Byron: “I didn’t take my pill today.”

10:35
10:45 Snack Time

- Clara: “Is FJ hungry? We’re having snack now.” Me: “Are there any leftover apples?” 10 minutes later. Clara: “There are 3 apples leftover, but I don’t know if everyone got apples or not.” 10 minutes later. “I think everyone who wanted one got one.” 1 minute later. “Can I just give one to FJ?”
- Shannon: “Tomorrow, you can take FJ out of his cage & I can teach him how to write tomorrow.”
- Mark: “Can FJ come out? I want to ask him some questions.” Me: “I thought you told me he was just a puppet... You still want to ask him some questions?” Mark: “Yeah.”
- Jacob: “Can I send Flap Jack one of my Zoo Books to read?

10:53

- Sofia: “Flap Jack got a lot of mail!! He better come out so he can read all of them.”
- Helga: “Ms. Yap, Ms. Yap! You should check his mailbox to see if anybody wrote anything bad about him!”
- The mailbox is loaded with mail, books, and even an apple!

11:00- L.A. Centers

- Mariah, Gehrig, & Brennan: “FJ is just a puppet. He doesn’t have any feelings. Did he really write all those letters?” “Can you bring him out? I think every time we have Word Station, FJ should join us.” Me: “I’ll think about it. If you think he’s just a puppet, then why do you want him out?” Them: “Because he’s funny! And cute. And cuddly.”

**Wondering:** Would it be too disruptive if I brought out Flap Jack during the course of the day, like at word station? Or should I stick to Morning Meeting?

- Dear Theresa,
  - I saw you work so quietly at the word table. Your other friends were talking next to you but you stayed focus on your paper. Nice!
    - From,
      - Flap Jack

- Dear Helga,
  - Ms. Yap told me that like to finish up working during recess. You must really like writing! You have a good attitude.
    - From,
      - Flap Jack

- Shannon: “Can flap Jack come out during recess? I want to teach him how to write.” Helga: “Yeah! I want to show him how the chimes ring to be a false alarm.” Me: “What did you want to teach Flap Jack again?” Helga: “Read, write, and color because I saw his handwriting and he’s not very good.”

- Dear Tracy,
I saw you sitting very quietly at the word station. You must work very hard. I wish I can sit still as quietly as you can. Sometimes I talk too much. Hope you’re having a nice morning.

- From,
  - Flap Jack

- Blake: “When will Flap Jack come out again?” Me: “When it’s quiet enough in this room. He’s really shy, remember?” Clayton started talking and Blake shushed him.
- Dear Blake,
  - Wow, you know all about your suffixes! I heard you say “You drop the E and add –ING.” Cool, I did not know that. Maybe you can help me with prefixes and suffixes. I get them mixed up with compound words.

- From,
  - Flap Jack

12:08
- I saw Brennan peaking into the puppet house. “Will FJ ever come out?” Me: “I think it’s a little too loud right now.” Brennan: “Be quiet or FJ won’t come out.” Blake: “You guys! Be quiet so FJ can come out!”

12:50-1:10: Outdoor-Indoor recess
- Clara whispered to FJ’s ear: “If you’re ever scared, we’re here for you.”
- Moment of spontaneous informal assessment:
  - 1/3 of students gathered around Flap Jack and tried to teach him how to write his letters. Then Sofia and Blake wanted to show Flap Jack how to write suffixes. The students kept telling him what suffixes are and that they’re learning that in class this week.

A new obsession
- Mark has claimed Flap Jack, the puppet, to be his “best, best, best friend.” This came as quite a change compared to his initial reaction to the puppet this morning. Now he constantly writes letters to FJ, hugs & kisses him, and tells his classmates about his new best friend.
- The next morning, he brought his mother in to meet Flap Jack. He made a huge letter to FJ written on Styrofoam poster board. Mark even brought his own puppet, Jack. He created a mailbox for Jack, just like Flap Jack, and shared Jack and a letter from Jack during Morning Meeting, saying that pancakes were the puppet’s favorite food, too (just like Flap Jack’s). As this peculiar obsession with the puppet continued, my mentor teacher and I discussed Mark’s close link to the puppet. We concluded that the puppet is considered a “non-threat” in the classroom because Mark can behave any way with the puppet and he will not “talk back.” Additionally, the students know that Flap Jack needs help with his writing and math. This enabled Mark to feel superior to the puppet because it gives him more control over who is smarter. I must figure a way to space the two away from each other because it is getting annoying hearing about FJ from Mark. The puppet is “safe” for Mark as he is showing effort in getting to know
more about Flap Jack by asking him questions in his letters to the puppet, but Mark must also learn to socialize with his peers in an appropriate manner.

MOMENTS OF BONDING

February 7, 2006.

Dear Blake,

- During math I saw you fooling around with the blocks. I feel unhappy when I see you doing stuff you’re not supposed to be doing. Hopefully I’ll see you following directions more.
  - From,
  - Flap Jack
- Blake’s wrote on the back & returned letter back into Flap Jack’s mailbox: “I’ll work on it.” 5 minutes later, Blake told me what he did and mumbled, “I didn’t do anything wrong anyway.” I’m still trying to figure out how to work with Blake & taking responsibility for his behavior.

Mark’s creation of his own puppet’s mail box brought more attention to his friend-making skills. He showed Jack to his classmates and they immediately started to write it letters. Mark knows the drill with the letters; you write a letter to the puppet, ask it questions & make comments, & the puppet may write you back. I’m assuming that Mark will communicate to his peers THROUGH his puppet, a behavior that is a “safe” way for him to make friends with his classmates, which I find intriguing. This has definitely turned the inquiry around. Mark’s behavior has drawn my attention from my use of puppets to his use of puppets for socializing with his peers.

During indoor recess, I saw Mark and 2 other classmates (female) sitting together at a table. Those same two girls had tried to help my puppet learn how to write and spell. Now I see them doing something similar with Mark & his puppet—a bonding experience for Mark and his peers.

February 8, 2006

Several students brought their own puppets and houses/mailboxes for their puppets. We shared them during morning meeting with my puppet and their puppets, introducing each other around the circle.

I caught the guidance counselor in the hallway. I told her about Mark’s reaction to the puppet and she was ecstatic. She said that his closeness to my puppet is creating a bond between him and me. This is a student whom he respects one authority figure at a time. After my talk with Mrs. Morrison, I did notice that Mark has come up to me voluntarily to tell me stories of shows he saw on T.V. 20 minutes later, I saw Mark writing a letter from his own puppet, putting a pencil in the puppet’s hands to write the letter. Then he put the letter into another student’s puppet’s mailbox. Mark is starting to socialize more with his peers.

Journals 7 & 8:
- You know this has to kill me to write, but I will anyway. After reading your last two journal entries I can definitely see the advantages to the use of puppets in a classroom. Of course, the educator has to be able to pull it off. I'm pretty sure I couldn't. Just seeing and
reading about M. sells me on the idea. I'm sure there are other children benefiting as well, but his story is great. I know it may only be a temporary solution, I'm sure you'll take it. I promise to check this out first hand, but I still need to work on not rolling my eyes.

Bill

MORE NOTES ON FLAP JACK INTERACTIONS

**Friday, February 10, 2006:**

Today’s Kelsey’s birthday. Mark made a birthday letter to Kelsey from his puppet Jack.

Mark: “Ms. Yap! I get to be in your group (math choice station) on Monday! I’m so excited! I’ve been waiting all my life!”

Letter from Flap Jack:
- Dear Cam,
  - Do you like to be called Cam or Cameron? I saw you working really hard at Today’s Number. Cool! Keep up the good work. I can’t wait to see more great math and writing!
    - From, Flap Jack

Letters to Flap Jack:
- Dear Flap Jack,
  - Your __ good f_eind.
    - Yo_r friend
      - Clayton
  - Correct these sentences including this one. You’re a good friend!! My birthday is on April eight! (letters backwards & spelling errors)
    - Love, Sofia.
    - PS: Write me back soon.
- Dear F.J.
  - When you write a note, make sure Ms. Yap checks it. (tons of spelling errors)
    - By Helga.
- Have a wonderful Sunday! (a drawing of an ice cream sundae).

**Monday, Feb. 13, 2006**
During Morning Meeting, Flap Jack appeared to share with a paper band-aid on his forehead and a paper sling around his right arm. Students anxious to find out what happened while Flap Jack whimpered.

- FJ: “I hurt myself. I’m ready for questions and comments.”
- Student: “How did you hurt yourself??”
- FJ: “I’m too embarrassed to tell you!”
- Students: “It’s okay! You can tell us!”
- FJ: “I was running down the hall and I fell down.”
- Student: “Well, next time you know not to run down the hall!”
- FJ: “Can I run in the classroom though?”
- Student: “No!”
- FJ: “But it’s not the hallway.”
- Student: “You can trip over a desk.”
- FJ: “Well, I remember more now. I was in a hurry. I wanted to get first in line.”
- Students: “It doesn’t matter, FJ!!! We’re all going to the same place!”
- FJ: “Well, someone else was also running the hallway. I almost ran into him, too! Do you think other people should run, too?”
- Students: “No!”
- FJ: “I actually jumped over a jacket and tripped on a bookbag. They weren’t hung up properly.”
- Student: “How long will you have your cast on?”
- FJ: “For a several days.”
- Student: “Can I sign your cast?”
- FJ: “I guess so.”
- Student: “How about your band-aid?”
- FJ: “Just a few days.”
- Student: “Can I see where you had a red mark?”
- FJ: “No, that’s okay. I’m too embarrassed to show you.” (there was no red mark!)
- Students: “Alright.”
- FJ: “Well, I definitely learned 3 lessons. But I don’t remember which they were. Can you help me?”
- Students: “No running!”
- Students: “You don’t have to be first in line!”
- Students: “Hang up your stuff properly!”
- FJ: “Whew! Thanks, everyone! Now I know how not to get hurt anymore. Well, I’m going to rest up now. Goodbye!”
- Students: “Bye, FJ! Can I give you a hug?”
Byron brought in his own puppet, Fluffy. He brought it out with him at recess and came over to the crowd of students (around Flap Jack and me). I tried to squeeze my arm by so Flap Jack could interact with Fluffy. Byron had a big smile on his face. As students were lining up to go back inside, I saw Mark talking to Fluffy. Fluffy “nibbled” on Mark’s finger and Mark laughed. Before I witnessed this, Mark and Byron had despised each other. Perhaps puppetry can bring them together with a common bond.

More kisses and hugs from students to Flap Jack even though FJ had already told them about bodies to themselves. Two students gave Flap Jack valentines in his mailbox. Many inquired about where his Valentine bag is.

Wednesday, Feb. 15, 2006.

Spontaneous decision to pull out the puppet. There was a lot of time left (15 minutes) at the end of my science lesson (sharing observations of the tadpoles & discussion about charting their observations later on), and I wanted them to tell me what they know so far about amphibians (from the lessons of that week). Instead of having them tell me, I decided on the spot to have the students explain to Flap Jack, who “missed” all the lessons. I found myself “winging” almost every interaction involving the puppet.

- FJ: “I heard you guys were learning about ampibiibians.”
- Students: “No! Amphibians!”
- FJ: “That’s what I said! Amphibibians.”
- Students explained about how the ph spelling makes an f sound.
- FJ: “So where were these amphibians born? Under a coconut tree like me?”
- Students: “Under the water. But they were eggs, not live births.”
- FJ: “You mean, I’m not an amphibian??”
- Students: “No, you’re a mammal!”

My email to Dan Thompson for advice:
- Hi, Dan,
  - My inquiry project consists of using a puppet in the classroom. I really want to do something about teaching diversity, embracing differences, etc. I want to address the issue of using phrases like, Chinese eyes, Chinese back cuts, etc. I seem to notice, and not just in my class, but from my childhood, that when something is different or looks like gibberish, children automatically label Chinese as part of what they're doing: "Look! I'm Chinese!" (pulling eyes) or "Look! I wrote Chinese!" when they make up a nonsense word. And I know it's because they don't know better; they're ignorant that what they're doing or saying offends people, especially me. My PDA, Bill Benson, suggested that I use my puppet to address the issue.
We usually set time aside in the morning to use the puppet for class discussions or to teach time to my 2nd graders. I was wondering how to start a discussion using this puppet to talk about being careful with our words, accepting differences, etc. My goal is to be able to share about our family cultures, our family traditions, etc. I'm looking for a book to kick off the discussion. I remember you sharing some books in SSEd class. Any suggestions or advice for me?

- Thanks,
- Mavis

An idea I got from tolerance.org.

- Start an advice column, like Dear Abby, but Dear Colette. She is a very quiet puppet, but I want to make her knowledgeable. She doesn’t ask “dumb” questions like Flap Jack. She asks students questions to assess their knowledge, telling them that FJ told her confusing details about time, etc. I can start off with a fake letter. Tell the class that Colette had a newsletter before she moved here and still receives letters. My partner classroom is 5th grade. I can talk to Alex to see if she wants to select a few specific students to answer some of my 2nd graders’ questions:
  - “As an offshoot of the "Gabby" concept, I began a program in which 5th-grade students respond (in much the same way "Gabby" responds to their letters) to questions from 1st- and 2nd-graders. Many of the older students were selected due to their own reputations as bullies; the exercise helped them develop empathy.”
  - March 21 (Tuesday) is the international day for the elimination of racial discrimination ([http://www.tolerance.org/teach/activities/activity.jsp?cid=74](http://www.tolerance.org/teach/activities/activity.jsp?cid=74)). There should be a cyber-petition on [http://www.march21.com/](http://www.march21.com/). There was a contest that was due in January to make a 1 minute video clip of what children thought of racism. Maybe I can make an i-movie for just in my classroom.

Another project:

- Chelsea & I have been talking about how in our next classroom, we want to put up a culture table with artifacts with our students’ family stuff--- recipes, clothing, pictures, toys, etc. I also want to incorporate family traditions, not necessarily authentic ethnic cultural traditions, but things children do with their families. I don’t want to leave anybody out who may not know much about their ancestry. I want to celebrate diversity, including family memories.

Books from the library to kickstart:

- *The Rag Coat* (PFE)
- *The Piano* (PFE)
- *Shades of Black* (PFE)
- *Children Like Me* (PFE)
- *We Sing the City* (PSU).

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**Wednesday, March 29, 2006.**

Mark asks me how I made the stationary for Flap Jack and Colette. I explained to him that I had drawn a picture first, cut it out, and then paste it onto lined paper. He continues to ask, fully interested, about how I put it into
the computer to print copies. I explained that after I cut out the picture and pasted onto the lined paper, I made photocopies. “Ohhhhh! Okay!”

“Okay. Now it’s time for a talk with Colette. I’m going to go get her.” “Shhh! Be quiet! She’s coming!” Student shush each other as I carry the puppets’ house over to the front of the room. I pull Colette out of the house. She is stretching & rubbing her eyes. Students anticipate her whispers. They immediately whisper greetings & wave to her. “Hi, Colette! Hi! Hi!” Students are very hushed & attentive. 3 children enter the room back from Title I. Their eyes light up & quickly find a seat on the rug. Colette and I open the book, Children from Around the World. Students call out requests to hear from certain countries. We review on a world map from which continents we have “met” children. Today I read about a child from Ethiopia. Throughout the sharing, I ask students what they have in common with the child so far. Hands immediately raise & students are eager to share. Some blurt out. I have to remind students about calling out because it disrupts the discussion & wastes time. This tells me that students are so eager to share that they blurt out. Students are interested in learning about other children of very different cultures. Positive attitudes.

Thursday, March 30, 2006.
Mark comes up to me first thing in the morning. He proudly shows me stationary for his puppet, Mr. Hairy.

Brennan brings in a stuffed animal & shares during morning meeting. He introduces the stuffed monkey. He shows his classmates how the monkey can spin when he twists the arms. Students automatically start asking the monkey questions about his background on gymnastics, spinning, etc. Brennan answered as the monkey.

I ask Mark if I could get a copy of Mr. Hairy’s stationary. He looked confused at the word stationary. I reworded my request. He takes out a piece of paper. He asks if I could make a copy and bring him back his. I asked him if this was his last copy. He says that he has 3 more. He says he wants to write more letters to Flap Jack and Colette. Some time during the day, I saw a letter from Mr. Hairy on Gehrig’s desk. Mark had written a letter to Gehrig, a boy in the class whom Mark respects.
APPENDIX D
Feb. 2-3, 2006

“We have another letter from F.J. today. Can you help me open the envelope and read it out loud?”

Students:

“When is F.J. coming? I hope it’s soon. Where is he sitting? Can he sit by me? I wish he was coming today.”
Feb. 6, 2006—Arrival Time—Comes today!

Good Morning, Stinkers! Fans!

It’s a beautiful snowy day.

We have fun today.

Are you excited to meet FJ?

Students kept asking me when “F. J.” is arriving.

I told them around 9 A.M.

A student went to the board and wrote FJ next to Morning Meeting and announced to the class. Students asked me where FJ is sitting.

Student: “Can he sit here next to me?”

FlapJack: “I know I’m in second grade, but I don’t know how old I am. Nobody told me. How do you know how old you are?”

Student: “I know how old I am because I was born! And my mom told me.”
Feb 6, 2006:
Students invited the puppet into their classroom community by sharing their favorite pieces of literature, drawings, and even an apple at snack time. “Ms. Yap, do you think Flap Jack is hungry, too?”

Feb. 6, 2006:
During indoor recess, students immediately welcomed Flap Jack into their hearts.
Feb 6, 2006
Indoor Recess
Students voluntarily gather around FlapJack.

Spontaneous moment of learning and assessment:
Students recited meanings of suffixes, prefixes, and compound words to Flap Jack. They also taught it how to spell "write" and explained silent letters. These were topics learned during this week and last.
A TURN OF EVENTS

The student who gave the most skeptical response to the puppet’s arrival became the most attached to it. The next day he brought his own puppet, Jack, and introduced it during Morning Meeting. He read aloud a letter from Jack. His closeness to Flap Jack strengthened his relationship with me, another authority figure in the classroom.
Feb. 7, 2006:

The boy continued writing many letters to Flap Jack. He even brought his mother in at arrival time to introduce her to his “new bestest, bestest friend.”

Students immediately wrote letters to the new puppet, Jack. “During indoor recess, a couple of students sat down with the boy and Jack to also teach Jack how to write. They interacted with the puppet, sharing questions and stories. By speaking through little puppet, the boy had ‘safe’ opportunities to bond with his peers.”
“What happened???”
“...I was running down the hall. I jumped over a jacket and tripped over a bookbag. I was hurrying to be first in line.”
Telling Time with Flap Jack

Fi: "What time does the clock say now?"
Students: "Nine-fifteen!"
Fi: "Huh? I'm confused! Why isn't it nine-three? These things are pointing to the nine and three."
Students: "Nooo! Duh, Fi! The short hand is the hour and the long hand is the three!"
Fi: "Ohhh! What's another way to write this? Student writes on board: "9:15"
Fi: "Okay. I have a question. Does it matter what order I write in? How about 9:15 or 1:915?"
Students squawk with laughter.
"Nooo! You can't do that! It's 9:15!"
A Talk With Colette

Covering tough subjects like bullying and racism.

Embracing diversity through sharing.
Hanging out with Flap Jack at recess.

We like to play Charades.

Sometimes other classes wander over & interact with Flap Jack.
Dear Mother,

I saw you on the phone yesterday. You were talking to your friend. It wasn't like you usually do.

Love, Mary
APPENDIX E
Dear Flap Jack,

Tomorrow you will go on your trip. You will turn off your phone and go on your trip. You will go to Witcher.

Love,
[Signature]
Der F.J. wen you
rit a not mac shor
Ms. Yap checi.
The Blanz are 1000.

Dear Shannon,

I can really hard at

I wish I can write

We write, Mr. Yap, and I need to

work on my letters?

Mayde you can help me?

From Flapjack.
Dear FlapJack,

Great job with those sentences!

I love you!

Love,

Sofia
Dear F.J.,

Hey F.J. thanks for the letter I wish you were one of us so we could see how good you can sit.

your friend,

Clayton
Dear F. J.

I hope you don't have a attack in your neck/head anymore.

Brenda
Enjoy this
delicious paper
Banana

love,
Mariah
Dear FlapJack,

How do you like our class room? Do you like us and our teachers? How is your new house?

your friend Jacob
You're cool F.J.!

From: Jacon

F.J. <- me
Dear FJ,

I love my family! Do you?
Dear F.J.,

We are having a great time. Write me back, please.

Love,

Clara
APPENDIX F
Dear Colette,
I have been having problems in my class. I don’t look like my friends. Sometimes they make fun of how I look when they think I don’t see them. But I do and it makes me sad. Just because my eyes are shaped different or my skin is a different color doesn’t mean I’M that different. What should I do?
From,
Somebody frowning
What happens if someone doesn’t listen to your I message?

Dear Colette,

Last year there was a kid that bullied me and wouldn’t stop. What should I have done?

From, Jacob
Dear Collette,

A Chinese student named Tailai came to our forest elementary last year. Every student in his class run away from him when its recess. What should I do to help him?
News from Room 181

Highlights
February 6 - 10, 2006

A New Friend
by Blake, Brennan, Gehrig, Mark, and Oscar
A new friend called F.J. came into our classroom. Everyone thought he is a real little boy but at morning meeting we saw him. He is a stuffed monkey. He is a puppet, too. He is really funny! We are teaching him how to write because he doesn’t know how, but he is getting better. F.J. stands for Flap Jack. We write him letters and he writes us back.

Writing Stories by Selie
Everybody had to write a fiction story about an animal. We made up the story but put animal facts in it, too. I finished mine. I wrote about bears. One bear got lost in my story. I read my story to the class and they found out how the bear got back home!

Predict and Cover by Mariah
I liked a game in math that we played and it was called Predict and Cover. It’s when you predict how many trapezoids or hexagons or blue rhombuses or triangles it will take to cover some kind of crazy shape. Then you cover it and see if you were right. Then you have to figure out how many of a different pattern block will cover the same shape. That’s the easy part!

Fishy Show by Clayton
This week we did our play for the rest of the school. It’s called "Sounds a Little Fishy To Me!"

100th Day!
It’s hard to believe that today is the 100th day of school! We celebrated by making trail mix with 100 pieces of different kinds of food. It tasted delicious!

Notes from Mrs. Humphrey
Good manners have returned!
Hooray! We have all worked hard to remember our good manners this week.
Thank you everyone!
Valentine’s Day Tuesday is our Valentine’s Day party. Remember to bring your cards Monday or Tuesday.
A note is attached if your child volunteered to bring something.
Friday is our Schoolyard Observation day. Please dress for the weather.
PTO Meeting, Feb. 15, 7:30 pm

Happy Birthday to Jacob and Kelsey!

Congratulations to Mariah for winning the Responsibility award and to Brennan for winning the Problem Solving award.
Tadpole Trauma
by Brennan, Clara, Clayton, Gehrig, Jacob, Kelsey, Shannon, Sofia, and Theresa

This week, Ms. Yap brought in 2 tadpoles. First we observed them. They have not grown legs yet. Then we talked about how tadpoles grow into frogs. The next day one died. We thought that the other one died before recess but after recess it moved. It's alive! Thursday we got 4 more tadpoles. Now we have five. One of them has bumped Shannon's hair. Now we have one fish, Elvis, 5 tadpoles, and a lot of snails. Ms. Yap moved the tadpoles into a tank of their own with air bubbling through the water. That's because tadpoles need oxygen to live. Our class is going to watch the tadpoles until they're frogs. We wonder how long it will take!

Flap Jack's Injury
by Blake and Mark

On Monday something bad happened to FJ. He jumped over a jacket and tripped over a backpack in the hall. Good news! FJ got better! We taught FJ to always walk. "I got hurt because I was running to be first in line. I guess I don't always have to be first since we are all going to the same place," says FJ, "and I promise to walk everywhere!"

Bird Pictures
by Oscar and Theresa

In art, we started bird pictures. They had to have four birds on it. It's called a bird family reunion! "I had fun drawing a swan, a bald eagle, pelican, and peacock," reports Theresa. We're not finished with them and we can't wait to see what they look like when they're done.

What's a Rectangle?
After we played Guess My Shape - Rule 1 - we thought about what makes a rectangle a rectangle. Some of our ideas: has 4 corners, has 4 sides, has 2 long sides and 2 small sides, long sides are the same length and short sides are the same length. We wonder if a square is a rectangle? Stay tuned!

Racing Stripes
by Moniah

I liked watching Racing Stripes at our Valentine's Day party. We only watched some of it. So for my favorite part was when Stripes the zebra raced the mailman.

Notes From Mrs. Humphrey
Feb. 20 No school-teacher day
PTO Read-a-Thon: Remember to fill in the books you have read since Feb 1 on attached "Reading Rocks" form. For every page you read, the PTO will donate 1c toward the purchase of books for the library. Forms due Tuesday.

Thanks to Mrs. Cornwall and Mr. Wilson for volunteering in our room this week.

Congratulations to Clayton for winning the Perseverance award!
News from Room 181
March 13 - 17, 2006

Observing Animals by Brennon & Sofia
We have a lot of animals, 1 goldfish, 5 tadpoles and a lot of ants. One of our tadpoles grew legs, the fish is always the same, and the ants we got Thursday. They have started to build tunnels in the sand. "I like that we have a lot of pets because I love animals," reports Sofia.

Researching Animals by Clara
On Tuesday we started research. I'm studying a squirrel. It is cool to be studying squirrels. Yaaaaay!

Flamingos by Clayton
Yesterday we learned about flamingos. We learned that flamingos change colors by their diet. They are all born white.

"Feathers for Lunch" by Jacob and Tracy
On Tuesday we read a book called "Feathers for Lunch." It had all the pictures made of cut paper, and the birds are the real size. After hearing the book, we made birds out of paper, and they're real size, too. After we finished, we wrote down its name and put it on a paper tree in our classroom.

Another Puppet by Brennon, Cameron, Sebring, and Kelsey
Two days ago, we got Collette, P.J.'s roommate! She lives in a trash can. She's shy, really shy. We're teaching Collette how to tell time.

My Magazine by Mark I made a magazine!

Animal Art by Oscar
On Monday in art, we made a beautiful picture of flowers and butterflies and ants. It took one day. I drew a daisy. It was beautiful and awesome.

Earthworms by Mariah
In Mr. Z.'s room, we got to work with Earthworms. We had to figure out if they liked light or dark, wet or dry, and we also had to figure out if they liked rough or soft. It was fun!

St. Patrick's Day
Today is St. Patrick's Day and we made potato people. We played a potato people math game, too.

Thank you to Mrs. Cornwall for volunteering in the classroom this week. We enjoyed observing Brennen's bearded dragon, too!

Congratulations to Cameron for winning the Sense of Humor award and to Oscar for winning Trustworthiness!
APPENDIX H
Mavis
Amphibian lesson - what an effective use of your Flap Jack puppet! Making the kids explain FJ's misconceptions about amphibians really made them verbalize their thinking. I noticed that most of the kids moved closer to you when you brought out FJ. You truly engaged most kids. Was this preplanned? Regardless, it really worked! Cathy
Nice!
P.S. A few of your comments had me chuckling - "That's a nice smile, but it's not going to help" to Cameron when he was fooling around.
All right, I admit it, the puppet does seem to stimulate involvement with the students! Except for a couple of boys hanging at the back, the class seems to be totally engaged. When some students returned from Title I I saw smiles and they immediately settled in on the rug. The concept you are working on, time is certainly a valuable thing for all of them to learn. You spent a nice chunk of time discussing the use of the colon and they seem to understand it fairly well. During this discussion things get a little chatty, but Flapjack seems to get them back fairly well. My question, when do you know to be Flapjack and when do you know to be Mavis? To close this part you introduce the idea of a new puppet. That certainly gets them fired up!

Time for a circle and physically they do it, but a little on the noisy side. You then begin math with a very soft voice and they settle down. The initial goal is to show one-half using six tiles and two colors. A vast majority did a nice job with this. I spent a little time with By. You might want to watch him a little bit with this fraction idea for the next few days. He appears to want to do something pretty, but the math idea is shaky. Mk. is a little off and one of your young ladies discusses the meaning of half very nicely. This is the strength of Investigations. Your students talk about math more like 3rd or 4th graders did 10 years ago. They are also able to see one half as being more than one arrangement. Isn’t it interesting that many of them don’t see it as half when it is an every other one pattern. After you’ve gone through everyone’s tile patterns you set up the activity they will soon be doing. You take this opportunity to go over the number way (1/2) to write one half. This is where I find it interesting that they now will see a wide variety of things that are equivalent to one half. You clean up the tiles with very little craziness and move to Geoblocks. Because they are different sizes, it leads to another conversation about equal halves. Mk. gets a little snippy about moving back to the circle. He’s got that look on his face, but he does end up moving. Now I’ll move on.

Except for a couple of brief moments, you were in total charge. During this time you varied your style and approach to the class as necessary. These adjustments show your changing role and level of expertise. It’s great to see your continuing development as a teacher.
As I enter you are just finishing up with the first part of the morning lesson. You bring out Collette to do some reading out of the “Children” book. It may not seem like much to you, but their was a very important moment at the very beginning. Some things fell off of the board to the floor. No one laughed or made fun of the situation. Several kids just scooted to pick up the things that fell and then they went back to their places. This shows that they respect you and want to help.

During the reading of the Tanzania child the class is very interested and responds well to the questions you pose. One child makes a somewhat inappropriate comment and you simply ask him if that was the case. It admits that it was and you continue without any incidence. After you are done with the first story you ask if they’d like to hear another and they readily agree. Next is a story about the Americas. This story reading provides the students with a great opportunity to share little personal things about themselves. I have always loved the little times with children. This is how you get to know them as people.

It’s time for math. You are running a center where the students are working with the number 100. They pinch some paper clips and then see how many it takes to get back to 100. You are supportive, offer some leading questions, and offer suggestions. The key phrase I hear is, “Show me how you get this.” With Ger you had a situation where he didn’t think he could do it. Just by being there he was suddenly able to do the problem. The power of teachers is shown again. Mf looks like he’s going to be a problem, but you quickly get him right back on task. He’s changed as the year has progressed, but so has your ability to handle those goofy little moments.

It’s time to move to my next location. Have a restful weekend.
SURVEY
If you answered yes to any of these questions, please provide examples/explanation.

1. What was your initial reaction to hearing about the possibility of using a puppet in the classroom?
   My initial reaction was not positive at all. I have never been impressed with puppets and their uses in the classroom. I've seen them as a pleasant distraction to work.

2. Did you notice any changes in student participation when a puppet was in use at the rug?
   Amazingly, I saw more appropriate behavior. There was less blaring and softer voices.

3. Did you notice any changes in student interaction since the puppet has been in the classroom?
   In one major case I saw a child, that can be difficult, interact more positively with others. He even brought in his own puppet.

4. Did you notice any changes in classroom management?
   See #2. Also children appeared to straighten up because they wanted to see the puppet.

5. Were there anything unexpected that came up in the students' responses to the puppets?
   At least to me, I was amazed at how they treated the puppet as real. Their lines of reality are different than mine.

6. Did any feelings or opinions change about the usage of puppet now (compared to the beginning of the project)?
   Definitely. While I still might not feel comfortable, I can see how they might influence behavior or management in a positive way.

7. If you have any additional comments, constructive criticism, or suggestions, you may do so here:
   Perhaps make puppets with the class (sock/paper/wood?)
   I think your enthusiasm started to wane. How do you keep it going?
SURVEY

If you answered yes to any of these questions, please provide examples/explanation.

1. What was your initial reaction to hearing about the possibility of using a puppet in the classroom?
   - I thought most kids would love the idea —

2. Did you notice any changes in student participation when a puppet was in use at the rug?
   - I was surprised by the high interest and participation of Blake and Mark —!

3. Did you notice any changes in student interaction since the puppet has been in the classroom?
   - You let the puppet
   - Kids loved getting letters from FlapJack

4. Did you notice any changes in classroom management?
   - There were no changes directly, but you were able to raise issues via puppets. The puppet was neutral to the issues.

5. Were there anything unexpected that came up in the students' responses to the puppets?
   - Many students brought puppets from home.

6. Did any feelings or opinions change about the usage of puppet now (compared to the beginning of the project)?
   - No — let me turn the question back to you: would you use puppets again? What would you do differently?

7. If you have any additional comments, constructive criticism, or suggestions, you may do so here:
   - As we discussed — you might want to have one special "puppet day" for kids to bring puppets from home. That way, the focus can remain on your puppets.
SURVEY

If you answered yes to any of these questions, please provide examples/explanation.

1. What was your initial reaction to hearing about the possibility of using a puppet in the classroom?

2. Did you notice any changes in student participation when a puppet was in use at the rug? Yes
   You had their full attention when the puppets were out.

3. Did you notice any changes in student interaction since the puppet has been in the classroom? Yes
   I've noticed that the kids used more respectful manners when the puppets came out.

4. Did you notice any changes in classroom management?

5. Were there anything unexpected that came up in the students' responses to the puppets? No

6. Did any feelings or opinions change about the usage of puppets now (compared to the beginning of the project)? No

7. If you have any additional comments, constructive criticism, or suggestions, you may do so here:
Circle a face to answer each question.

1. How did you feel when you first learned that FJ was coming to the class?

2. How did you feel when you found out that FJ was a puppet?

3. How did you feel about getting a letter from FJ?

4. How did you feel about writing a letter to FJ?

5. How did you feel about FJ coming out during recess?

6. How did you feel about FJ talking about time?

7. How did you feel about talking about different cultures with Colette?

8. How did you feel about Flap Jack?

9. How did you feel about Colette?

10. On the back of this paper, write any comments you have about using puppets in the classroom.
Theirs can be your best friend. They're very cute. I like writing letters. I like how they talk.
I love puppets. So, I like it when both of them came out.

They are cute. I like the way you make them talk!
I think it is a good idea.
Click on the filmstrip icon to play the movie clip.

QuickTime™ and a H.263 decompressor are needed to see this picture.