Puppets and painted self-portraits as means to facilitate professional communication with children and young people

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Professionals working with children may use imagination and playful approaches when talking with children. It can be a challenge to capture children’s experiences, and their feelings related to these experiences. Aesthetic forms of expression involving puppets and painted self-portraits can support the professional dialogue, and help to maintain a common focus. The aim is to help children express themselves, and put their (tacit) knowledge into words.

In this paper, we will discuss two aesthetical approaches to professional communication with children, and ask the question: What can professionals learn about children’s experiences by using puppets and painted self-portraits to facilitate communication and the professional dialogue?

The two authors have trained undergraduates in the child welfare programme in these methods for many years. In workshops on painted self-portraits, the students supervise the children in the painting process. In other workshops, reflective puppet play is used to vitalize the dialogue with children. Our empirical material contains videos, paintings and written material from students’ work with children and young people. In this presentation, we will present our findings, and illustrate with empirical examples. In the analysis, the two approaches are compared.

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