

May 11, 2009 4-1

Hi Everybody,

One day at the close of a performance of The Farm Concert play, a boy made a comment that he had an idea for a play and it would be called, "The Crab Who Ate Nine Fishes". It was dismissal time so there was no opportunity to pursue his idea immediately. All the same, it was a fortuitous occurrence because teachers often like to try the idea of kids making their original stories into plays and what better springboard than this suggestion from one of the group.

So the next day a teacher sat down to write the story with the boy. We had been making small clip boards available to kids and these had attracted many, consequently the boy chose one of these to use for his play. The story did not consist of much more than the original elegant title and when a teacher had recorded it he then set about helping the boy to cast his play.

The social implications of this part of the activity are striking. Kids have the opportunity to invite others to participate and then have them sign up for a role. Kids, who are a little more reserved about approaching others to play, often find that the written structure of this activity along with the additional support offered by teachers provides a safer, more predictable way to proceed. Hence these personalities often sign up repeatedly for turns. The chances to get more confident are great.

There is almost always a lot of negotiating that goes on at this phase. Once they get the hang of how the casting works there are usually a lot of kids who want to sign up and often there are little bargaining sessions for certain roles. For example this time, someone was lobbying for the addition of a lobster. Presumably, he would have status with the crab. His efforts however were unsuccessful, the playwright remained adamant in keeping his first draft. He asked each actor to sign up on a different page of his clipboard until he had the required cast. We performed it at group time and at the close a number of kids said that they had an idea for a play too.

So, the next day we started a sign up list for plays. Many of the following efforts showed influences of the first. Here are some titles, "The Duck Who Ate Nine Fish", "The Allosaurus Who Fought with T-Rex", and a number of princess plays wherein the princesses get eaten by a dragon with an overly active salivating gland.

The princess plays also introduced a group of heroines known as the Supergirls. The Supergirls have been an active part of this year's fantasy play for most of the girls in our room. Now they were being included in many of their dramas. All kinds of creatures were being eaten, but there was hope of rescue from the Supergirls who would come and pull the devourees out of the devourer's mouth.

Playwrights were also encouraged to include a drawing with their play. On days when the overhead projector was available, we would offer transparencies for kids to draw on and then project it on the curtain during the play. Other days if kids made a drawing on regular paper we would tape it on the curtain. On either occasion we would ask if they wanted to say anything about their drawing. Many of these were various lines and curves, so further description was helpful.

The audiences have been supportive and enthusiastic about performances. During the bow there are multiple congratulations and cries of "You were great!" or "You're the best!" The satisfaction is widespread so we'll continue on with plays until the close of school.

Melinda and Joseph