The arts issue

In this issue

Music, drawing, drama and literature

Hong Kong children’s TV

Musical practices in the home

Unpacking children’s views, and common assumptions, about the nature of art

Art for art’s sake and art for life’s sake

and more …
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The arts issue

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**Editorial**

**THIS ISSUE OF THE** Australian Journal of Early Childhood focuses on the arts and young children. Anyone who has engaged in the arts with young children can attest to the sheer joy children gain from participating in the arts and, for many of us, ‘art for art’s sake’ is reason enough! Ironically, while creativity is currently enjoying star status at the top end of education, those of us who work with young children are finding the arts increasingly squeezed out in favour of the more academic outcomes for teaching and learning. While we refuse the binary logic of separating the arts and the academics, it is useful to be able to access both sides of the coin. Rather than seeing the arts as a frill to learning and development, we see the arts as a powerful source of joy, pleasure and a form of intellectual challenge, cognition, communication and learning and emotional, cultural and spiritual understanding. The task is to convince others, and share our ways of seeing.

Thankfully, there is a growing body of evidence demonstrating that children have higher levels of achievement in the so-called academic skills when engaged in arts-rich programs. This was the dominant message of the widely publicised Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning report (Fiske, 1999). However, this document did not specifically address arts engagement and arts learning prior to formal schooling. Likewise, Australia’s National Review of School Music Education (DEST, 2005) examined music education only from children’s commencement at primary school. Many of the most recent syllabus documents and curriculum guidelines for early childhood education—in Australia at least—have pushed out the arts, or they are concealed under broader labels, such as communication or ways of learning. This neglect of the arts in early childhood strengthens the importance of this issue of the Australian Journal of Early Childhood, where research is presented alongside practical implications for practitioners to further our understanding and application of the arts in early childhood.

**Deans, Brown and Young** present an evocative case study of a drama teacher’s process drama session centred around ‘The Possum Story’. The authors provide a vivid description and analysis of the teacher’s reflection in action, and reflection on action, in a drama session with four-to-five-year-olds in a long day early learning centre. They remind us of the power of drama to promote creative problem-solving through responsive questioning using relevant child-centred content. Just as Deans, Brown and Young demonstrate how drama can be seamlessly integrated with other arts areas, **Niland** demonstrates the way literature can be integrated with music, movement and dance. The author outlines a variety of strategies for integrating music and literature in particular, and provides a wide array of suggested children’s storybooks that can be used to do this in a rich, authentic way.

The effectiveness of music-appreciation activities, as part of early childhood television programming in Hong Kong, is the focus of **Yim’s** article. Interviews with preschool children and their teachers point to the effectiveness of these programs in engaging them both in world-music activities. In doing this, children were exposed to styles of music they may not hear in daily popular culture. The children’s and teachers’ responses to the programs demonstrate active student engagement in a variety of different music activities, something which is frequently absent in early childhood television programming.

**de Vries** also examines young children’s use of media, as seen through the eyes of parents. He found that parents value their children engaging in music; but, due to time constraints and lack of parental musical skills, this frequently occurred through CDs and DVDs for their children to listen to and watch without adults being present. Although parents point to perceived benefits of children engaging with these media, such as providing quiet time for children and helping to develop listening skills and numeracy, de Vries points to many areas that parents and educators need to be aware of if relying on these media to provide musical experiences for young children.

**Richards** provides us with a careful account of the history of beliefs and attitudes about children’s art, and raises thoughtful questions that take us beyond the taken-for-granted claims around children’s ‘natural’ development. She makes visible how the long-held, and mainly Western, beliefs about child art have been shaped, and how they shape our practices. Her article finishes with a call to include children’s own voices in the conversation about the arts, and this call is answered in this edition by Yim, Wong and Wright.

**Wong** asked young children in Hong Kong about their views of art. The questions explored children’s perceptions of why they do art, how they learn it, and what they like about it. Their responses are surprising, and provide us all with much food for thought. A favourite concept that Wong explores is the idea that
children consider art a ‘mystery’, and the children articulate some of the paradoxes they experience as a result of the arts activities provided for them in their programs. The research methodology employed here is one that would be usefully applied to scrutinise many of our practices with young children—not just in the arts.

In Wright’s article, we hear more of the children’s voices, and this fascinating research is impressive for its rigour, as well as the insights provided through such close scrutiny of the children’s processes. Here is a complex reading of children’s artistic engagement, and Wright unpacks for us the children’s use of symbols, signs, body, emotion and thought—giving us a new way of seeing the many languages of children. She makes it clear why we need new understandings of literacies, and shows how children actively work across the boundaries between words, images, texts and other forms of communication. Like de Vries, Wright’s research reinforces the importance of ‘being there’ while children are creating meaning.

McArdle and Spina report on a project involving recently arrived refugee children from Africa, and suggest a model for the understanding and teaching of the arts as a powerful language for communication, as well as for capacity building. The paper documents one artist’s way of working with young children: a seamless approach that includes art appreciation and understanding, along with the ‘doing’ of art. Here is one way of seeing art for art’s sake and art for life’s sake. The arts provide a perfect space for working with young children, recognising and catering for difference, and all the while building knowledge, communication and social skills, as well as social capital.

We see this special edition of AJEC as a valuable resource for those of us who seek to advocate for the arts—when the pure pleasure of the arts no longer stands as reason enough—in the current climate of outcomes and accountability. Each of the authors makes a strong case for the arts, and their passion, rigour and weight of evidence should help us all as we continue to advocate for the arts in early childhood.

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References

The possum story
Reflections of an early childhood drama teacher

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SUPPORT FOR REFLECTIVE PRACTICE (Dewey, 1910; Schön, 1983) as a way of reviewing, articulating and informing practice, is well-established within teacher education and research, though there is still much to learn from the individual experience of the practitioner who grapples with the reflective process. This paper highlights the deliberations of a teacher undertaking a process drama (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995) program with one group of four-to-five-year-old children. One story stemming from this program, entitled ‘The Possum Story’, is presented to illustrate the complex decision-making processes and teaching strategies evident in the work of the drama practitioner who was faced with several challenges, including how to determine engaging and relevant child-centred content, how to stimulate the interests of all children in the developing story and cater for their needs, and how to promote creative problem-solving through responsive questioning. This paper examines the teacher as a reflective practitioner and provides a useful reference for other early childhood practitioners grappling with the possibilities and challenges related to exploring drama with young children.

Introduction

TO FULLY REALISE THE opportunities for play, creativity and learning inherent in a drama experience for young children, the teacher needs to adopt a variety of roles, including motivator, guide and co-artist. The challenge for the teacher is to know when to lead and when to follow the children, and this requires an open and flexible approach, with decisions often made spontaneously and intuitively while working alongside children. To sustain and develop an engaging drama program for young children the practitioner needs to reflect on the choices and values that have guided their decision-making. Such reflection, when formally documented, can provide an important reference for other early childhood practitioners who are exploring drama with children. Working from this premise, this paper presents a case study of the reflective practice of one drama teacher working with a group of 20 four-to-five-year-old children attending an inner Melbourne long-day early learning centre. This paper centres on a detailed description of one process drama session, entitled ‘The Possum Story’, which was developed through reference to audio-recorded meetings, teacher portfolio documentation and a video-recording of the session. Throughout this study, grounded in the experience of the practitioner (Patterson, Fleet & Duffie, 1996), the aim was to de-privatise (Meiers & Ingvarson, 2005) and make explicit a drama teacher’s reflective dialogue in relation to the issues and challenges faced when engaging young children with process drama.

Process drama and young children

Young children naturally explore their world through dramatic play, taking roles, acting out situations through cooperative play, and learning about ‘their world, about themselves and especially about human nature—how and why we behave the way we do’ (O’Toole, 2002, p. 48). In the early years, learning through process drama (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995) links naturally with the preferred learning styles of children who thrive on spontaneous and active inquiry centred on the exploration of real and imagined worlds.

The benefits of process drama are well-documented and include language development, collaborative problem-solving, decision-making and perspective-taking (Donelan, 2002; O’Neill, 1994; O’Toole, 2002). Process drama provides a unique approach to uniting children and teachers in a dynamic interplay of role-taking where all participants act out ideas that are formed and reformed in the context of a fictional story that unfolds as a creative process of exposition, rising action and
complication, climax and denouement (Warren, 1999). In a safe environment children are encouraged to behave ‘as if’ they are someone else (Toye & Prendiville, 2000) and in doing so are empowered to take the central role in the emergent dramatic exploration, a responsibility that requires them to consider their actions and the impact of these on others, to look at reality through fantasy and imagination, to see below the surface of actions to their deeper meaning (Wagner, 1979). As Winston and Tandy state, 'it is through achieving the distance afforded by fiction that we can reflect more securely upon issues which have significant effects upon our daily lives' (2001, p. vii).

In this approach to drama, the role of the teacher is to set the scene and encourage the children to become the experts (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995) who are acknowledged as writers, actors and directors with the knowledge and capacity to create, develop and resolve stories. The teacher empowers the children to become the experts by accepting their spontaneous ideas and attaching them to the central story. As experts, the children in an early childhood context all take on the same role so as to avoid confusion and the drama becoming fragmented (which can be the case if small groups of children are allocated different roles) (Warren, 1999). As a group they work together to find solutions to problems posed by the teacher throughout the drama. The development of the unfolding story is stimulated by the teacher’s knowledge of the individual needs and preferences evident within the group. Through the use of open-ended questioning, animated expression and enthusiastic responses to the children’s ideas, the teacher draws the children into the role-play and invites them to create and maintain the dramatic world (O'Neill, 1994). This process involves the co-construction of an emergent story that requires the teacher to adopt roles including motivator, guide and artist—roles that are continually refined and developed through reflection in and on practice (Schön, 1983).

Reflective practice

The importance of reflection to teacher development is now widely acknowledged (Brookfield, 1995; Gore & Zeichner, 1991; Howard, 2003; Larrivee, 2000) as a central pedagogical construct based on the argument that ‘education without research or innovation is education without interest’ (Malaguzzi, 1994, p. 71). Further to this point, O’Donoghue and Brooker note that if ‘the overall quality of teaching is to be improved, teachers must become more aware of their subjective beliefs about teaching’ (1996, p. 101). In early childhood, where there is an identified need for practitioners to become more aware and articulate about what they do and how they do it (Stonehouse, 1992), reflective practice is fundamental.

John Dewey defined reflection as thinking with a purpose, whereby teachers ‘continually consider what underlies beliefs and knowledge as well as actions and conclusions that follow from them’ (Johnston, 1994. p. 10). For Dewey, reflective thinking involved searching into a problem, contemplating a solution, then analysing the problem-solving process so as to resolve other problems and ultimately to gain understanding (Dewey, 1910). The work of the reflective practitioner as noted by Donald Schön (1983) is informed by reflection in action and reflection on action. Schön challenges the image of teachers as technicians who simply transmit pre-formed knowledge, and replaces this with a more complex view of professionals who actively research into their own practices and theories. From this perspective teachers can be considered as ‘artists’ (Munby & Russell, 1989) who engage with children in creative problem-setting and problem-solving situations rather than simply implementing a preset program.

Reflection in action and reflection on action are crucial to the development of an early years process drama program. Reflection in action is evident when the teacher adopts an open-minded and flexible approach informed by regular self-monitoring (Taylor, 1998) that allows the children’s ideas to direct the emergent story. Reflection on action that occurs after the event can be supported by systematic documentation, including recorded observations, journals, photographs and children’s reflective drawings and stories. The complete process of reflecting in and on action can ensure a critical review of issues and tensions surrounding the planning, implementation and evaluation of the program. Reflection on one’s choices and values requires the practitioner to make explicit what is often tacit knowledge, and this can be a challenging process that can benefit from the support of ‘trusted’ others who have the skills to guide reflection (Raban, Waniganyake, Nolan, Brown, Deans & Ure, 2007) and generate critical dialogue. In doing so it assists the individual practitioner to reflect on, document, confirm and challenge deeply held beliefs.

The Possum Story

The following description and analysis of ‘The Possum Story’, written from the perspective of the drama teacher/researcher, provides insight into the complex decision-making processes, teaching strategies and learning outcomes evident in one process drama session. It illustrates and examines a one-hour session undertaken with a group of 20 children aged between four and five years, attending a long-day inner city early learning centre in Melbourne, Australia. The detailed description aims to capture the essence of the lived experience (Patton, 1990) evident in the session that was documented using the teacher’s lesson plans, journal notes, transcripts of children’s comments, photographs and children’s artworks.
The children were immediately engaged by the character and the use of a scarf for 'The Possum Lady.' This was achieved through a change in voice and character very clear (Warren, 1999) and in ensuring that interest and energy is maintained for the drama (Toye & Prendiville, 2000). During the unfolding drama I move through characters and spontaneously respond to the children's ideas, group response (Warren, 1999), creating an atmosphere of whole group engagement and exchange. In doing so, the children's responses layer and build upon each other to form into an emergent story that encourages a deeper group response (Warren, 1999), creating an atmosphere of engagement and exchange.

A significant challenge is to involve all children equitably in the development of the story. This is achieved through the use of one-to-one open-ended questioning. Time needs to be found to make contact with each child, and it is important that I am sensitive to the different personalities and learning styles in the group. I involve them in a variety of activities, including song, discussion, movement and humour to cater for their 'different types of intelligence, cultural backgrounds and values' (Wright, 2003a, p. 59). In the case of 'The Possum Story' the children engaged in diverse movements while acting-out crawling into a forest and balancing in a boat, and were regularly encouraged to share their ideas through both words and actions.

**Origins of the story—the beginning**

As an experienced drama teacher my interests and experiences, and those of the children, generate the content for each session I teach. In the case of 'The Possum Story', I responded to the children's strong interests in local animals and my personal experience of finding a sick possum.

I begin the drama session with the routine of the children taking off their shoes and socks and placing them in the 'shoe shop'. The children enthusiastically move to sit around the edge of a special meeting place that has been created with colourful fabric. At the beginning I always remind the children that this room can turn into another place and we can be other people. I make it clear that we are going on a fictional journey together, and the children are encouraged to 'suspend disbelief' (Dunn & O'Toole, 2002) so as to openly and fully engage in the emergent story.

The children wait with their 'home-room' teacher in anticipation. I re-enter the room with my hands cupped and explain how I have found something on the floor outside. The children ask what it is. I reply that I do not know and I show them what is in my hands, which are empty. Some children say there is nothing there, and I ask them to keep looking or close their eyes and think what it might be. In the case of 'The Possum Story', one child stated 'it is small', and another child said 'it's an animal', and then other suggestions followed. By encouraging children to imagine what is in the empty hands I stimulate the imagination and playful thought which are central to the drama (Toye & Prendiville, 2000).

During the unfolding drama I move through characters and spontaneously respond to the children's ideas, ensuring that interest and energy is maintained for the story. So as to stimulate the emergent story for this drama, I adopted two roles: first a girl who found the sick possum and later a woman who looked after sick possums who we named 'The Possum Lady' (Illustration 1). For young children it is necessary to make any changes in character very clear (Warren, 1999) and in this drama this was achieved through a change in voice and the use of a scarf for 'The Possum Lady.'

The children were immediately engaged by the character of the girl who found the possum, and I asked them: 'Does anyone here know anything about local animals? Because I need local animal experts to help me to take care of this possum.'

Child: 'I do, I do!'

Teacher: 'Well, what do you know about local animals?'

Child: 'They like food.'

Child: 'Possums live near the river.'

Teacher: 'Where do possums live?'

Child: 'In the big trees.'

Child: 'I've got possums in my garden.'

Teacher: 'So what do possums like to eat?'

Child: 'The possums ate our plants at kinder.'

Questioning based on the children's responses encourages them to go deeper into their thinking and to solve problems creatively. It also allows the group to bounce ideas off each other, and I work hard to ensure that all children are given a voice. Throughout the drama I ask questions, such as 'I wonder? What if? What should we do? How do we? And What else do we need?, so that it becomes the children's story. I consider the children to be not the players but the writers, actors and directors of the work. I seek multiple answers to the questions I pose to create an atmosphere of whole group engagement and exchange. In doing so, the children's responses layer and build upon each other to form into an emergent story that encourages a deeper group response (Warren, 1999), creating an atmosphere of engagement and exchange.

Some children are timid and shy and seem apprehensive to work in the group. Some children are very physical with other members in the group—rough/fast. The timid ones seem a little threatened by the more physical. Maybe I need to do some warm-up games to address this before next week's drama.

Teacher's Journal, 2005 p. 28
My ability to reflect on my own action (Taylor, 1998) is challenging, as I am in the drama. My mind is in many places—the children's voices, the story, the group, the individual—and I strive to achieve a sense of balance across these areas of attention that shift throughout the drama.

Creating the story—the middle

Once the idea for the story is established the process drama continues. Later on in this story I became The Possum Lady who gave each child a hat with an imaginary possum inside (Illustration 2). By engaging in discussion based on how the possum feels and its needs, I was able to explore ideas that have broader human significance, such as empathy and care for other living things (Winston & Tandy, 2001).

Teacher: ‘How do you think a possum feels when it is sick?’
Child: ‘Sad.’
Child: ‘And scared.’
Teacher: ‘How can we help the possum?’
Child: ‘We have to feed it.’
Child: ‘When I am sick my mummy cuddles me.’
Child: ‘And makes me a bed in the lounge room.’
Teacher: ‘What sort of bed can we make the sick possum?’
Child: ‘A warm one, in a blanket.’
Child: ‘We need to take it back to its home in the bush.’

Responding to the children’s ideas on how to care for the possum, a journey to the river was decided on. The idea of the river developed naturally from the children who had recently undertaken an excursion to a nearby river park. Through questioning we worked out what would be the best way to travel up and over the river: by a boat, by swimming or by a bridge? We discussed ways to build a boat and eventually settled on a construction formed of coloured fabric and imaginary wood. A storm occurred and we had to solve many problems, such as ‘How can we row without oars?’ ‘How can we fix our leaking boat?’ and ‘How can we see when it is dark on the river?’

I must regularly review what is feeding the story so as to incorporate the children’s ideas, but I can’t use all their ideas. It is a constant balancing act to develop a coherent story that is responsive to the children’s ideas and interests. Questioning the children’s ideas requires them to make choices and problem-solve throughout the story. It is important to respond sensitively to the children’s ideas that are not acted upon so that these children do not stop contributing. ‘Great idea’, I hear myself saying regularly, or making a comment such as ‘But there are no dinosaurs here. Remember we are trying to find the home for the possum.’ Being positive but clear about the story is something that is always in my mind.

Tension in the drama is vital (Dunn, cited in Wright, 2003a, p. 215) to keep the story engrossing and creative. These tensions are generated by provocations from the teacher and the children's questions and responses. They arise as part of the unfolding drama; for example, through encounters with a river that needs crossing, a mountain that needs climbing, or a dangerous animal that is blocking the way. As the teacher, I guide the children to review, combine and layer their ideas, and to find collective solutions to these tensions. In doing so, I encourage a steady flow to the story. Several times it is necessary to bring the children together to remind them of where they are in the story by re-telling the events so far, a strategy that acts as a way of managing spiralling energy and re-focusing the children’s thinking.

Creating the story—the middle

This drama moved from one place to another, the use of props—my cloth, my questioning, up-time and down-time, children’s voices, the action, the tension, all came together. What a class, how on earth do I know what happened to allow this flow to work again?

Teacher’s Journal, 2005, p. 36

‘The Possum Story’ continued to grow and develop until we arrived at a satisfactory conclusion. The children had already stated that the possum needed to find its family, so at the end of the journey we found a safe place for its release in the forest (Illustration 3).

The final rituals—the end

The story had now come to a conclusion, but I need to find a way to ‘Get back to Kinder’. This is an important part of the process drama, particularly for young children who may still remain in the story and need to be clearly informed that the story has ended (Warren, 1999). I ask for suggestions, and we use an imaginary helicopter to carry the children, one at a time, back to kinder. As a way of ending the session I leave the room and return as myself, thus making it very clear to the children that the drama has concluded.

The ritualistic ending involves sitting together and recapping the story experience, followed by the children drawing ’something remembered from the story’, with my transcriptions of the children’s verbal captions. The opportunity for children to express their ideas and feelings through images and words expands their ability for representational thinking (Wright, 2003b). In doing so, it allows the experience of drama, drawing and language to enrich and inform each other and, as Dyson states, it provides an opportunity for the children to ‘transform the themes of their dramatic play.
into dictated texts and back again to play’ (1990, p. 56). These drawings and captions, along with my record of the drama, are finally compiled to create a story-book for children, parents and other teachers to enjoy at a later time. This valuable information acts as a form of pedagogical documentation (Wright, 2003b) that helps me review what aspects of the drama the children thought were significant and memorable.

Reflection

‘The Possum Story’ illustrates how the children’s and teacher’s interests provide authentic content for drama, particularly when children are cast as the ‘experts’ (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995) who have ownership of the story, bringing with them personal knowledge, experience and ideas. Through opportunities to act out a range of responses in the safety of the imagined place, the children explored possible alternative solutions to scenarios that required careful consideration and empathy, in this case how to best care for a sick animal. In doing so, the children used stories to explore significant issues (Winston & Tandy, 2001) and also learned to work cohesively towards the achievement of group goals.

Throughout the unfolding drama of ‘The Possum Story’ the teacher moved between the roles of motivator, guide and co-artist so as to stimulate imagination, play and creative problem-solving (Wright, 2003a). Open-ended and responsive questioning were central to a creative approach to teaching that engaged children in collaborative decision-making and problem-solving where there were ‘no right or wrong answers, only possibilities’ (Schirrmacher, 2002, p. 6). The practitioner’s ability to ‘act on her feet’ in response to an emergent child-directed story necessitated reflection-in-action and flexibility. The planned and systematic recordings of the drama session, captured in the teacher journal and story-book, provided the tangible detailed descriptions necessary for effective reflection-on-action, and in this regard the teacher demonstrated the role of a researcher who ‘searched and re-searched, experimenting with ideas and seeking clarity’ (Taylor, 1998, p. 128).

Conclusion

This paper stems from the commitment of one drama teacher who was prepared to act as a researcher through her efforts to document, and communicate her beliefs and practices to others. It highlights the value of the reflective process as a way of articulating, informing and improving practice, a view supported by Taylor, who states that ‘if teachers can empower themselves to believe in their own capacity to act as researchers, if they can generate faith in their own ability to observe and reflect critically on their work, then they are capable of effecting change in their own educational setting’ (1998, p. 129).

An analysis of these reflections provides insight into the challenges faced by the drama practitioner working with a large group of young children. These include how to determine engaging and relevant child-centred content, how to stimulate the interests of all children in the developing story and cater for their needs, and how to promote creative problem-solving through open and responsive questioning.

In conclusion, this paper provides an illustrative and instructive example of practice that may stimulate others to engage in process drama experiences that respond to children’s interests and provide rich opportunities for children to create, act-out and reflect on significant emergent stories.

References


Illustration 1.

“That’s the old lady and she takes care of possums. This girl gave it to her so she can look after it.”

Illustration 2.

“That’s the possum I’m holding in my bag.”

Illustration 3.

“We followed the footprints to find the possum’s home.”
Musical stories
Strategies for integrating literature and music for young children

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HUMANS HAVE COMMUNICATED through arts such as storytelling, music and dance throughout history, and have often used combinations of different art forms to express ideas. Just as traditional storytellers have done in many cultures through the ages, early childhood practitioners can use a variety of art forms when they share books and stories with children. This article outlines ways in which music, movement and drama can be integrated with literature, providing young children with experience of a range of artistic symbol systems. The author presents practical ideas for developing musical stories based on her experience as an early childhood music educator and researcher, and discusses the potential for future research into children’s use of symbol systems such as music and dance in exploring literature.

Background
‘SING ABOUT A RED TRAIN!’ ‘Let’s do it very fast!’ Children love to create ideas and lyrics, and to take ownership of songs. Likewise, children will often put themselves into stories: ‘I’m that one’ or ‘I do that when I go to the beach.’ Sipe (2002) terms this spontaneous involvement ‘expressive engagement’ and describes how this type of response is often used by children as they seek to make meaning from literary texts. Laevers (1996) recognises engagement as being an essential ingredient of quality early childhood curriculum. Laevers’ research shows that when children are engaged in experiences they demonstrate high levels of focus, intense mental activity and creativity. Because creative arts such as music and literature invite these forms of engagement, they have an essential role to play in the early childhood curriculum.

For the author, the opportunity to share music and stories with young children has been one of the great pleasures and privileges of being an early childhood practitioner. Reading stories, singing, dancing and playing instruments with children have provided her with innumerable special memories over many years of work in early childhood. These experiences have highlighted the natural links between music, dance, drama and literature, and the need to explore these further with young children. This article presents some ways of integrating the performing arts with literature, developed by the author in her work as an early childhood practitioner and researcher.

Through arts experiences children can develop their senses and their imagination (Eisner, 2002). In many societies today, electronic media such as TV, video, DVD and CD-ROM form a central part of the lives of many young children. This means that children experience stories through a range of symbol systems, such as language, visual images, music and sound, simultaneously. However, most often, these experiences predominantly involve passive exposure to these symbol systems, rather than active experiences with books and resources such as musical instruments and puppets.

Early childhood practitioners are influential in nurturing a love of books in young children as they take their first steps towards literacy. The play which can arise from literature experiences is an important part of young children’s creative and literacy development (Roskos & Christie, 2000). Many practitioners use music, in particular singing, in their early literacy programs (Fisher, McDonald & Strickland, 2001; Smith, 2000). Research in this area indicates that musical experiences such as songs, rhymes and rhythmic games can help with the development of phonemic awareness (Lamb & Gregory, 1993; Smith, 2000).

However, as well as being valuable as a tool for the development of literacy skills, music can be used along
with stories and literary texts as a symbol system in its own right. If active music-making and the related performing arts of dance and drama are used in a playful way with books and narrated stories, engagement with multiple literacies is encouraged. Children can explore a variety of symbol systems in active, physical, sensory and creative ways. For young children, learning is all about making connections such as those between music and stories (Bartel & Cameron, 2000): ‘Seeing music as another text allows the discovery of many parallels between the processes of storytelling and musicalising [sic]’ (p. 27).

Music and storytelling have gone together throughout history. Many ancient cultures, such as those of Indigenous Australians, use music and dance to tell stories. As young children play together they often create narratives, taking on roles and becoming deeply engrossed in musical/artistic performance. Chants, snatches of song, sound effects and dance are also part of this socio-dramatic arts play. When adults read or tell stories, children respond eagerly to opportunities to be part of the story; they will be more engaged, and think more deeply and creatively, if given these opportunities. As play is the natural learning medium in early childhood, it makes sense for us to facilitate playful arts experiences for young children by incorporating music with literature.

Young children engage actively with learning experiences through their senses:

The senses provide the material for the creation of consciousness, and we, in turn, use the content of consciousness and the sensory potential of various materials to mediate, transform, and transport our consciousness into worlds beyond ourselves. (Eisner, 1994, pp. 17-18)

Eisner argues strongly for the importance of the arts in education, showing that, since the beginning of their history, humans have used their senses to create and interpret codes of representation which symbolise their experiences. He states that the purpose of education is to help children learn both to understand these codes of representation and to use them to ‘create their own meanings’ (1994, p. 19).

Literature and music are two such codes of representation. They primarily provide auditory experiences for children (plus visual experiences in the case of picture books). If literature and music are presented together, children can be inspired to respond in many different ways: chanting, singing, moving, dramatising, exploring musical instruments. Through these responses children will be both making and creating meaning. They will also be using several different intelligences as they interpret and co-create musical stories: musical, linguistic, kinaesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, spatial and perhaps even spiritual (Gardner, 1993). Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences provides strong justification for the integration of art forms such as music with literature in early childhood education, as this combination of symbol systems allows children to use and develop a wide range of intelligences.

During book-reading and storytelling experiences, aural stimulation is provided by the reader/narrator’s voice and visual stimulation is provided through illustrations, puppets, toys or similar resources. The linking of musical experiences (such as singing, playing instruments and dancing) to story experiences provides the potential for greater sensory engagement. Picture books embody a close and often complex relationship between text and illustrations (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996) and this interaction contributes to children’s meaning-making (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003; Sipe, 1998). It is my contention that music and text (or music, text and illustrations) can have a similar relationship, which can be used by children to engage with and make meaning from narratives. This is because the addition of music to this experiential equation adds extra sensory, semiotic and aesthetic dimensions.

Music has many semiotic conventions, which contribute to our meaning-making when stories are presented with music in media such as TV, film and live theatre (van Leeuwen, 1999). These conventions form part of our cultural learning, and many are unconsciously understood by very young children. Some examples of this are the use of minor keys and unresolved harmonic patterns to suggest sadness or tension, the use of major keys to create a happy mood, the use of changes in tempo or dynamics to enhance the changing pace or mood of the story, and the use of different instruments or timbres to convey humour or other aspects of character. When educators give children opportunities to respond musically to a story, children will use musical elements such as tempo, dynamics and timbre to show their understanding of the text. With some adult guidance and encouragement, they will be creatively exploring the musical symbol system as well as engaging in meaning-making from the literary text.

Children’s experiences with both literature and music contribute significantly to the development of aesthetic appreciation. Both provide a sense of pleasure or satisfaction, and lead children to begin to form visual and aural preferences. Picture books provide an aesthetic experience both visually and aurally. Music provides an aesthetic experience which is aural and kinaesthetic. Given that children engage so much with their senses and bodies, the experience of music and literature together has rich potential for expressive responses.

**Strategies for integrating music and literature**

There are lots of different strategies which educators can use to add a musical dimension to stories or to add a narrative dimension to songs and musical experiences.
Here are some the author has found engaging for young children.

**Sound and story**

Many picture books lend themselves to being turned into musical experiences, as the rhythm and sometimes the rhyme seem to invite a musical response. The text of a picture book is often very simple, and authors sometimes use techniques such as alliteration to give the language a musical feel. A picture book can become a song or even a piece of musical theatre.

One way to add a musical dimension to a picture book is to create sound effects using percussion instruments, everyday objects and/or vocal sounds. Pamela Allen’s picture books, *A lion in the night* (Allen, 1985) and *Bertie and the bear* (Allen, 1983), are two favourites. Familiar folk tales such as *The billy goats gruff* also work beautifully with an instrumental accompaniment. Each child can be provided with a set of claves (tapping sticks) for tapping the rhythm of the billy goats ‘trip-trapping’ across the bridge, and a recycled can for making lots of raucous noise to represent the troll. The author sometimes tells this story using felt figures or laminated cut-outs with velcro backing. This also allows the children to play independently with the story materials and thus further explore the story in their own way. The integration of music and text in this story is an excellent example of exploring different codes of representation of meaning—as the children use tempo, volume and timbre of musical sound to represent the sizes of the goats and the ferocity of the troll.

Both sound and dramatic movement can be added to stories. Children can take turns to either dramatise or provide sound effects for stories such as those described above. Given that young children often spontaneously respond to music through movement or dance, the provision of opportunities for active physical response may be highly engaging for many children. They can enact the characters themselves, or manipulate puppets as an adult narrates the story. Puppets can be commercially produced, or made from laminated pictures mounted on paddle-pop sticks.

A picture book which is wonderful for sound and movement is *Emily likes to bounce* by Stephen Michael King (2000). Whenever the author has read this to children, someone always gets up and says ‘I can do that!’, and spontaneously begins to bounce. This book has prompted extensive active exploration of different ways to bounce and intense discussion on the difference between bouncing and jumping, as well as on what sorts of sounds go with a variety of bounces. ‘Read it again!’ is an inevitable response to this book.

**Sung stories**

Some picture books can very easily be turned into songs. Those with limited, repetitive and/or rhyming text work best. The reader can improvise a tune, perhaps adapted from a simple traditional children’s song such as ‘Mary had a little lamb’ or ‘Here we go round the mulberry bush’, or can make up a two- or three-note chant similar to ‘I’m the king of the castle’. Books by Rod Campbell such as *Dear zoo* (1982) work very well when sung in this way. The reader can speak some lines for dramatic emphasis and variety. An educator with some confidence as a singer can create simple tunes which use the semiotic codes of music in ways which relate to the story. For example, a slower tempo and lower voice to indicate tiredness or sadness in the text, variations in tempo which relate to moments of suspense or resolution of tension in the story, higher notes for a smaller animal, lower ones for a larger one, rising pitch to convey a question and harmonic resolution of the melody to suggest an answer. If sung stories become popular, the children will often begin to improvise vocal lines for particular characters or parts of the story.

Sometimes picture books have a refrain which can be turned into a song, and children can be encouraged to sing along. Where is the green sheep? by Mem Fox (Fox & Horacek, 2004) sung in this way is very popular with many children the author has worked with. The ‘Hairy Maclary’ and ‘Slinky Malinki’ series by Linley Dodd are also ideal for setting a refrain to a tune. This type of chorus is easily memorised by children and enables them to be part of the storytelling process.

*Slinky Malinki, open the door* (Dodd, 1999) also seems to invite the addition of instruments, so that children create a cacophony of sound to accompany the mess the cat and bird make in the house. Allowing children to choose the types of instruments, rhythms and tempo to accompany each type of mess gives the educator an opportunity to observe and reflect on the children’s ideas about the antics of the animals in the story and the consequences of these.

Such a learning experience brings up the issue of documentation. As music is primarily aural, the use of audio or video recording is an important part of this. Audio recording is easy to organise, as the equipment currently available is relatively inexpensive and easy to use. As long as a recording device can be safely placed nearby, it can be switched on and left on, thus not taking an educator away from interacting with the children. Listening to the recording later allows the educator to reflect on the ways children have used musical elements to explore the meaning of a story. If the children are also able to listen, they too can reflect and discuss their musical story creation. This will enhance the educator’s understanding of the children’s thinking, and may also lead to extensions of their musical/literary exploration in the future.
Adding a narrative to a song

A few years ago the author conducted some research with three-year-olds attending early childhood music classes, where she studied their levels of engagement with songs and musical activities over a semester of weekly classes (Niland, 2005). She found that the children were most engaged with songs when they were able to respond in a playful way, and that one of their favourite ways of engaging playfully was to dramatise a story along with a song. A story can easily be created around songs about animals or transport. ‘Old Macdonald’ can become a story about a farmer who goes to the markets to choose the animals for his farm; or about a farm where a lion comes and tries to chase the other animals, until Old Macdonald phones up the zoo to come and collect their runaway lion. ‘The wheels on the bus’ can become a story about a trip to the city to visit a museum, or about a bus that breaks down: ‘The wheels on the bus go clunk, clunk, stop!’ or ‘The engine on the bus goes eeeeeee—bang!’

Adapting familiar traditional tunes to original lyrics can enable educators to create many musical story experiences. Creating lyrics which fit with the rhythmic patterns of the original lyrics can be challenging; however, some licence can be taken with this, as long as the adaptation has a comfortable rhythmic flow and the tune remains recognisable. ‘Here we go round the mulberry bush’ can transform into ‘This is the way we creep through the jungle’, as the children become explorers, complete with cardboard roll binoculars. The song can also become ‘This is the way we walk in the bush’ as the children spy Australian animals. A rough plot can be thought out in advance and then developed in a variety of ways according to the children’s suggestions. For very young children, toys, pictures, finger puppets or felt figures can help to stimulate their thinking.

Here is an example of a musical story created around an adaptation of a familiar song such as the one mentioned above. The educator can begin the story in the time-honoured way:

> Once upon a time there were ... explorers [the number of children in your group]. They put on their hats, packed their rucksacks with supplies and binoculars, and set off into the jungle. They walked very slowly and carefully under the big trees, chopping away vines to make a path ...

Intersperse verses of the song into the story, stop to use the binoculars and spy whatever the children suggest; and so the musical story will progress. Educators may like to decide on a few possible endings in advance or they may prefer to let the children decide. If the explorers become over-excited, the story could draw to a conclusion like this:

> ... and then the sun began to set; and the explorers found their way back to their tents, where they climbed into their sleeping bags and went to sleep, being very quiet so the lions wouldn’t hear them.

During the research described above, the author developed a musical story about dinosaurs. It was a great hit with all the children and was revisited, adapted and extended over several classes. The song used was ‘10 little dinosaurs’, based on the tune of ‘10 little Indians’ (Larkin & Suthers, 1997, p. 95) The group began by using large toy dinosaurs, one for each child, and the story traced a day in the life of some baby dinosaurs who left their mother’s cave and went exploring, then went back to the cave at night to sleep with their mother. The children suggested lots of different things the dinosaurs could do, including splashing through the swamp, eating all the trees, jumping over logs and getting lost. On some occasions the children pretended to be dinosaurs instead of using the toys, and their parents (who accompanied the children to the classes) formed a cave. This was such a popular musical story that, two years later, when some younger siblings came along to the classes, the first thing their big brothers asked them afterwards was, ‘Did you sing the dinosaur song?’

Adding a song to a story

Instead of creating a story around a song, a song can be linked to an existing story. The song can become part of the story, giving children a chance to be actively engaged, or it can be sung at the end, as an extension. One example of a song which can be used in this way is ‘When Goldilocks went to the house of the bears’. The author often tells this old favourite, using felt figures, and pauses to sing each verse of the song with the children so that the verses match the action of the story. It is important to think about the structure of a narrative and the dramatic tension that is created, so that any musical enhancement heightens this. While some stories can be suspended for a verse of a song without disrupting their flow, others will be less engaging if read in this way. In these cases the song can be sung after the story is read, allowing the children to revisit the story by creating their own verses. The pig in the pond by Martin Waddell (1992) is an example of a story which can be followed by a song. ‘Old Macdonald’ can become ‘Old farmer Nelligan’, and the children can help you to invent verses which retell parts of the story.

A song can also be used at the beginning of a book or oral story to set the scene, or at the end of a book to extend the children’s experience. For example, if the story involved a journey, it can be preceded or followed by singing a song about cars, trains, buses, walking, or whatever transport fits the story. The children can do the actions suggested by the song as if they are the characters in the story. The children may help to compose some new verses to the song which extend the plot of the book or story you have just shared, or even become an alternative version. Rosie’s walk by Pat Hutchins (1968) can be recalled and...
extended in this way, as the children think of other parts of the farm through which Rosie could unknowingly lead the fox. The song 'London Bridge' can become ‘Rosie the hen went for a walk, went for a walk, went for a walk, Rosie the hen went for a walk, all around the farm’. One group of children the author worked with decided to add warnings to the story and the song; one verse of their song became ‘Watch out Rosie, look behind you’.

**Rest times**

Rest time in a childcare centre and bedtime at home are often story times. According to current notions of early childhood curriculum, such as that embodied in the NSW Curriculum Framework (NSW DOCS, 2001), these routines play a role in young children’s learning and development. Therefore musical stories, as well as helping children relax as they settle for a sleep or some quiet time, provide an engaging literature/arts experience as part of this period of the day. Stories which are slow-paced or about restful things can be read in a quiet, soothing voice while soft recorded music is played. There are many CDs marketed as being peaceful, calm or soothing, some of which have been designed for use with children. It is advisable for educators to familiarise themselves with the music and select tracks which set the right mood without overwhelming the story. Pieces of music which stay the same throughout, or are quite repetitive seem to work best as a background for storytelling or reading aloud.

Some picture books which are about bedtime, night or sleep can be suitable for reading in this way. *Goodnight moon* by Margaret Wise Brown (1947) and *Time for bed* by Mem Fox (1993) are two examples. For children who are beginning to enjoy listening to stories without pictures, you can find an anthology of stories for young children and choose some which lend themselves to being read with a background of restful music.

**Conclusion**

Integrating art forms such as music and literature is something children often do naturally in their play, which practitioners can make use of when developing early childhood curricula. Through the arts, young children learn to understand and use many different symbol systems for representing ideas and experiences—becoming in a sense multi-literate. This is widely acknowledged by supporters of arts education as being an important part of educational curriculum in the twenty-first century (Eisner, 2002; Wright, 2003). However, in spite of this, and of the existence of practitioner literature about integrated arts curriculum, little research has been done into children’s meaning-making through the use of multiple art forms such as literature and music. Music and stories are uniquely human creations which have fed our souls from the beginning of our history. Why not continue to build upon such ancient cultural traditions?

**References**


Exposing young children to music through the production and presentation of music-appreciation television programs

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University of South Australia

**THIS PAPER REPORTS ON** a research study of the effectiveness of a series of music-appreciation activities for young children in Hong Kong. These activities were designed using world music and were presented as part of a local early childhood television program for community interest. One-hundred-and-sixty-eight local preschool children (mean age 4.25) and their classroom teachers, from 16 childcare centres or kindergartens, participated in this study. Qualitative data was collected using individual structured interviews with both children and teachers. The data showed that these music-appreciation activities enriched children's musical experiences and teachers’ musical repertoires in early childhood settings. Teachers also showed positive preferences to learn the activities using multimedia tools. Implications for the curriculum planning and teacher training of early childhood music education are discussed.

**Introduction**

Music appreciation for young children has been a long-standing topic in research on early childhood education. Researchers have revealed the positive impacts of music-appreciation activities on child development. These include increased cognitive skills (Crncec, Wilson & Prior, 2006), improved self-esteem (Warner, 1999), improved physical coordination (Hirt-Mannheimer, 1995) and wider aesthetics responses (Yim, 2005). Researchers have also proposed pedagogies for conducting music appreciation activities with young children; for example, the use of recorded music (Jalongo, 1996), and repeated listening to enhance familiarity and responsiveness (Levin, Pargas & Austin, 2005). Some researchers also emphasised the importance of music appreciation for young children by arguing that human beings, from infancy, possibly possess an innate ability to appreciate music and/or other aesthetic subjects (Dalla Bella, Perets & Rousseau, 2001; Lawler, 2005; Trehub, Schellenberg & Kamensky, 1999). Although these research studies and arguments may have provided sufficient rationale for conducting music appreciation activities with young children, most of them are based on data from Western societies. There appears to be a lack of studies exploring teaching and learning issues surrounding music appreciation for young children in an Eastern context.

This study set out to explore the effectiveness of a method of presenting a series of music appreciation activities for children in Hong Kong. Such information, if available, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of early childhood music education.

In Hong Kong, music appreciation has long been included as one of the learning areas in the local early childhood curriculum. In the *Guide to the pre-primary curriculum* (Hong Kong Curriculum Development Council, 1996, pp. 88 & 91), teachers are encouraged to ‘enhance children’s ability to appreciate music’ by arranging music appreciation sessions during music lessons and/or at other activity times. In a new curriculum, to be implemented in 2007, teachers are still encouraged to teach children to ‘appreciate the beauty of nature and works of art’ and to provide opportunities for them to ‘appreciate diversified arts so as to broaden their knowledge of art and cultivate their appreciation ability’ (Hong Kong Curriculum Development Development Council, 2006, pp. 35-36). In addition, both versions of the local curriculum (Hong Kong Curriculum Development Council, 2006; Hong Kong Curriculum Development Institute, 1996) and another government publication, *Performance indicators* (Hong Kong Educational and Manpower Bureau, 2003, p. 13), have emphasised the need to encourage children to appreciate the arts of different cultures and forms.
The above curricula provide basic directions for music-appreciation teaching for local early childhood educators. Also, they confirm the perceived importance of including music appreciation in the curriculum for young children. However, the use of music from diversified cultures and forms may not yet be a common practice in the early childhood music contexts in Hong Kong. There seems to be a gap between teachers’ understanding of these theoretical principles and their possible practical implementations in the local context.

In an attempt to build upon the theoretical principles and the findings of Western research on early childhood music education, this study explored to what extent young children in Hong Kong benefited from a series of 16 music-appreciation activities which were a synthesis of three major approaches: world music, Orff Schulwerk and multimedia.

1) World music

World music is ‘used broadly to encompass styles ranging from traditional music to globally marketed dance music with a traditional flavor’ (Hart, 2003, p. 683). Sixteen world music excerpts were chosen in this study according to the different themes of each program (see Table 1). The themes were selected by producers of a local early childhood television program from Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK), entitled Pre-school: Learn to fly III. This program was broadcast weekly on a local free television channel and also uploaded onto its official website (www.rthk.org.hk) for community access. This series of music-appreciation activities was filmed as segments of each program.

2) Orff Schulwerk

One of the major objectives of this music educational approach (Wheeler & Raebeck, 1985, p. 11) was ‘to give an immediacy of enjoyment and meaning to the child through active participation in all experiences’. Such participation provided for elements of responsive body movement, imitation and improvisation (Shamrock, 1997). Indeed, enjoyment and active participation are essential to learning, especially in early childhood (Moravcik, 2000; Ridley, McWilliam, Raspa & de Kruif, 2001). These two essentials were also emphasised in the local curriculum guidelines in the arts domain (Hong Kong Curriculum Development Council, 2006, p. 63; Hong Kong Curriculum Development Institute, 1996, pp. 87-88, 94-95).

3) Multimedia

Multimedia can be described as ‘the use of multiple forms of media in a presentation’ (Schwartz & Beichner, 1999, p. 8). Music excerpts for the activities in this study were recorded on mini discs (MDs) and on CD-R (WAV files) for teacher participants. Players for these two audio formats were accessible at all participants’ workplaces. As well, the researcher provided teachers with video home system (VHS) tapes and VCD (WMV files), with

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Name of music</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Duration of excerpt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>New home</td>
<td>Good news to my home</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>57 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Smile</td>
<td>Cubanismo</td>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>56 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>Beach Samba</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>47 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Under the sea</td>
<td>On the Beach at Waikiki</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>41 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Box</td>
<td>En Douce</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>1 min 2 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Fly</td>
<td>Flying of the Plane</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>54 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Flower</td>
<td>La Mariposa</td>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>1 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Candy</td>
<td>Viener Bonbons</td>
<td>Vienna</td>
<td>41 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Fireman</td>
<td>Hendry</td>
<td>Madagascar</td>
<td>47 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Taste</td>
<td>Las Bicicletas</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>51 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Shoe</td>
<td>Im schwarzen Walfisch</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>1 min 5 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Hands</td>
<td>Shakin’ Hands</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>40 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Shadow</td>
<td>Yi-Rrana (Sundown)</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>1 min 10 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Toys</td>
<td>Je Vous Aime</td>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>38 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Chef</td>
<td>Il Walzer Degli Amici</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>33 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Egg</td>
<td>A Mover La Colita</td>
<td>Columbia</td>
<td>1 min</td>
</tr>
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</table>
suggested physical movements and narration for each musical excerpt according to the melodic contour and/or rhythmic patterns.

**The research study**

This study was devised to assess the effectiveness of a series of 16 music appreciation activities for young children in local pre-school settings in early 2005. Three major questions were applied:

1) What were children’s views of this series of music-appreciation activities?
2) What were teachers’ views of learning a music-appreciation activity by using multimedia tools?
3) What, if any, were the possible benefits and challenges to early childhood teachers when implementing this series of music-appreciation activities in the local teaching context?

It was hoped that the results of this study would serve as a reference for subsequent curriculum planning and teacher education.

**Sample**

Participants were 168 children (73 males and 95 females) and their classroom teachers in 16 childcare centres or kindergartens in Hong Kong. The mean age of children was 4.25, with 44 children aged three years, 64 children aged four years, and 60 children aged five years. Using purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002), childcare centres and kindergartens that conduct group music-appreciation activities were invited to participate. Approximately 10 children in each childcare centre and kindergarten were chosen by basic random sampling (Lewin, 2005). Children who had consent forms from their parents were assigned a number for sampling purposes. Classroom teachers were then assigned numbers using a table of random numbers (McMurray, Pace & Scott, 2004). All teacher-participants were qualified early childhood educators who possessed a minimum of Qualified Kindergarten Teacher (QKT) qualification or its equivalent (see www.edb.gov.hk).

**Method**

Each of the 16 music-appreciation activities was assigned to a childcare centre or kindergarten, according to the filming schedules arranged by the centres and television program producers. A music MD, a CD-R, a VHS tape and a VCD were given to the classroom teacher approximately three weeks before the visit from the researcher and the filming team. Teachers were asked to become familiar with the music and movements, using these audio and visual resources, before presenting the activities to the children, using physical movement, simple narrations and the MDs or CD-R only. It was recommended that teachers include the assigned music-appreciation activities lessons as a segment (maximum of five minutes) in their normal daily music lesson approximately one week before the visit from the researcher and the filming team. Teachers and children were also encouraged to match their physical improvisations to the music.

Qualitative data was collected at the end of the filming process through individual structured interviews (McMurray et al., 2004) with children and their classroom teachers. Interviews were conducted face to face, in Cantonese (a major dialect of the southern part of mainland China). Notes were taken during the interviews and the data obtained was classified anonymously.

The children were asked two questions. The first concerned their preferences for the music-appreciation activity by providing a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ response. The second was an open-ended, follow-up question where children disclosed what they liked or disliked. Children who were unwilling to respond verbally could choose to point to a picture with symbols of ‘tick’ and ‘cross’.

The teachers were also asked two questions. The first, which was scored on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly dislike) to 4 (strongly like), concerned their preferences for learning a new music-appreciation activity through the use of multimedia tools. The second was open-ended and sought their views of the benefits and challenges, if any, of implementing the music-appreciation activities in their teaching contexts.

**Results**

**Responses to question 1: Children’s preferences and views of the music-appreciation activities**

An initial analysis showed that 89 per cent of children liked the music-appreciation activities. Children commented positively on the activities that allowed them to respond physically to music. Children's negative comments were generally related to the physical settings of the activity (see Table 2).

A 2 (yes/no) x 2 (gender) Chi-square analysis showed that there was a non-significant relationship ($\chi^2=.01$, df=1, $p>.05$) between children's response patterns and their gender. Such a finding implies that a child's gender does not have a relationship with children's preferences of the music-appreciation activities. A 2 (yes/no) x 3 (children's age: 3, 4 and 5 years) Chi-square analysis showed that there was a significant relationship ($\chi^2=6.53$, df=2, $p<.05$) between children's response patterns and their age. Specifically, 89 per cent of children showed preferences for the music-appreciation activities, with children aged four years scoring the highest percentage (39%) and children aged three years scoring the lowest percentage (23%).
Responses to question 2: Teachers’ preferences for learning a new music-appreciation activity through the use of multimedia tools

The results of the study showed that teachers (N=16) tended to respond positively to the use of the multimedia tools (e.g. nine ‘strongly liked’ and seven ‘liked’). Specifically, teachers appreciated the accessibility and efficiency of the multimedia tools. A 2 (strongly liked/liked) x 3 (children’s age) Chi-square analysis showed that there was a non-significant relationship (χ²=4.49, df=1, p>.05) between teachers’ response patterns and their children’s age. This finding implies that children’s age does not have a relationship with their teachers’ response patterns. The following examples illustrate some of the teachers’ responses:

- The materials are very user-friendly. I can easily know how to use them, although I am not very good at high-technology stuff. (Teacher of three-year-olds)
- I’ve downloaded the music into my MP3, so that I can listen to it while I’m on the way home … this gives me more chance to get familiar with the music. (Teacher of five-year-olds)
- I like the video tape, as I’m a visual learner. I learn quicker by watching. (Teacher of four-year-olds)
- The use of both audio and visual materials helps me to learn the activity easily and quickly. (Teacher of four-year-olds)

Responses to question 3: Teachers’ views of benefits and challenges of the implementation of the music-appreciation activities

All teacher-participants agreed that the activities had a positive impact on the variety of repertoire and the enjoyment of their music classes. Of the 16 teachers, 11 reported the unexpected positive and joyful responses from children to the new music genre. However, 12 teachers mentioned their lack of confidence in conducting similar activities in the future as one of their possible challenges. Ten teachers were concerned about the inadequate resources in their local context. Examples of teachers’ views of benefits and challenges are shown in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Children’s comments on the music-appreciation activities</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• It’s exciting to dance around the room. (Four-year-old girl)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• This music is very different from our daily music. It makes me move. (Five-year-old boy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I can use my hands and my feet in my own way … very funny. (Five-year-old girl)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I like this music … because I can dance with it. (Three-year-old boy)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3. Teachers’ views of benefits and challenges</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The activity enrich the repertoire of my lesson … I’ve never noticed that my children can be so attentive and happy to listening activity. (Teacher of five-year-olds)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• It is really unexpected that children showed such a great interest to the music. They even asked for repetition. (Teacher of three-year-olds)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I am really surprised that children love African music … It is my first time to hear this type of music. It sounds good. (Teacher of four-year-olds)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teaching music appreciation can be such a great fun and easy thing. It is not as difficult as I thought. (Teacher of four-year-olds)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The activity enrich the repertoire of my lesson … I’ve never noticed that my children can be so attentive and happy to listening activity. (Teacher of five-year-olds)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

The major aim of this study was to examine the effectiveness of a series of music-appreciation activities presented in the local context. First, the findings showed that the majority of children had positive preferences for and views about these activities. The children especially liked the opportunities to move along with the music the activities provided. This finding concurs with other
early childhood research, such as that conducted by Lay-Dobyera and Dobyera (1993), van der Linde (1999) and Russell-Bowie (2005). Moreover, children aged four years and above in the present study showed a higher percentage of preference for the musical activities. This finding may imply that the activities presented were more appropriate for the older children in the group. In this research, however, the children’s ‘dislikes’ pointed to some possible constraints in the local teaching context, including the limited space and the subject-oriented timetable. Teachers might therefore consider focusing on aspects of how experiences are organised and managed. The arrangement of music activities in the outdoor environment, for example, and a balance between spontaneous and planned music activities can be two possible recommendations for further consideration and research.

Second, the findings showed that all teachers in this study indicated positive views and preferences for the use of multimedia tools in learning a new music-appreciation activity. They mainly appreciated the accessibility, efficiency and mobility of these tools. This finding is consistent with Holden and Button’s research (2006, p. 32) which found that teachers generally preferred ‘simple schemes or teaching packs with learning outcomes for each year group … schemes that were teacher- and child-friendly, and that provided time-saving activities’. In addition, teachers’ comments further emphasised the benefit of multimedia tools where learners were able to learn more deeply from words and pictures than from words alone (Mayer, 2005, p. 5). Nevertheless, further research that is sufficiently sensitive to learners’ sociocultural environments and levels of confidence may be needed in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of local teachers’ needs and competencies when using multimedia tools in early childhood music education.

Last, all teacher-participants indicated that one of the major benefits of this series of music appreciation activities was to increase the variety of music in the classroom. This finding is an echo of Woody and Burns’s (2001) argument that one of the recognised goals of music education is to expose children to styles of music that they might not hear through their involvement in daily popular culture. In addition, surprisingly, teachers identified that most children had positive responses to and preferences for world music—a genre new to both teachers and children. Children’s unanticipated responses may imply that the curriculum music repertoires for listening activities would need to be widened, and teachers would need to have a better understanding of young children’s musical needs and preferences. Indeed, an increase in the quantity and quality of positive exposure to a musical experience is important because Carper’s (2000) research found that using repeated exposure combined with instructional activities enriched preschoolers’ and kindergartners’ preferred musical styles. However, teachers in this study also pointed out some possible limitations that may restrict them from conducting similar activities in the future, such as their lack of confidence and the difficulties in locating relevant teaching resources. Similar findings have also been revealed in Western classrooms (see Hennessy, Rolfe & Chedzoy, 2001; Holden et al., 2006; Russell-Bowie & Dowson, 2005). Some further research on the possibilities of providing relevant musical training and resources may encourage teachers to attempt music-appreciation activities incorporating a wider diversity of musical genres.

Conclusion

The findings of this research suggest that both teachers and children had positive views about this series of music appreciation activities. Teachers indicated positive preferences for the use of multimedia tools and were able to identify some possible benefits and challenges when implementing these activities. The findings may further enrich the literature related to young children’s early music-appreciation experiences and their musical needs. Nevertheless, further research on the development of culturally diversified music appreciation resources and the curriculum of teachers’ musical training is recommended. Helping children to understand and appreciate the music of the world’s cultures may still be a long-term goal in music education (McKoy, 2003); but it is undeniably important, as music may enhance not only one’s musical and aesthetic potential but may also positively affect one’s holistic development.

References


The use of music CDs and DVDs in the home with the under-fives
What the parents say

Peter de Vries
Monash University

THIS ARTICLE REPORTS ON parents’ perceptions of the way music CDs and DVDs were used with children under the age of five in the home environment. This was part of a study that explored the musical practices of parents with children at home. A survey was sent to parents in three preschools, asking about parental music background, young children’s involvement in music programs, types of music children were exposed to in the home, and frequency of musical activities conducted in the home. Following the survey, focus groups were conducted to further tease out trends that emerged in the survey. One of the trends was the reliance parents placed on music CDs and DVDs in providing music for their children. The use of these materials in the home is discussed, as are implications for parents and early childhood educators.

Introduction

LITTLE IS KNOWN ABOUT what parents provide in the way of music stimulation to children under the age of five in contemporary Australian homes. Considering that research continually points to the crucial role parents play in nurturing children’s musical development in early childhood (Custodero, 2006; Feierabend, 1990; Gembris & Davidson, 2002; Kemp, 1996; Lecanuet, 1996; Trehub, Hill & Kamenskys, 1997), a research project was embarked upon to explore musical practices at home. The aim was to determine the musical practices parents engage in at home with their children under the age of five and what affects these practices. Broadly speaking, the study found that parents highlighted a lack of time to engage in regular music-making with young children, parental belief that preschool and other educational settings provided a complete musical experience for children, lack of parental knowledge about music and music education, parental focus on the extramusical effects of music, and reliance on commercially available products such as CDs and DVDs for music in the home. In this article the final finding of this project is explored—parental reliance on music CDs and DVDs.

Methodology

Parents of children in three Australian preschools were invited to fill in a brief survey about the music activities provided for their children under the age of five in the home environment. Sixty-three (of 101) parents responded. The survey was a modified version of the survey that Custodero and Johnson-Green (2003) administered to the parents of infants, focusing on the frequency and types of music activities parents provided in the home environment. Following the survey, parents were invited to be part of focus groups to discuss the results. Focus groups were chosen to explore why particular trends emerged in the survey (Kreuger, 1988). Group discussion allowed for interaction between participants rather than just with the researcher, thus permitting a group of parents to comment on perceptions, attitudes and reasoning (Kitzinger, 1994; Morgan & Spanish, 1984). Eleven parents indicated willingness to participate, facilitating the establishment of two groups of five and six parents respectively.

Results

The five questions listed below from the initial survey indicate parental responses in numerical terms. These five questions, and the numerical responses, were discussed in the focus groups.
Analysis of results

Two points were immediately striking in the results to these survey questions: (1) the infrequency of music activities occurring daily (the highest being 18 per cent of respondents, for playing music to children; the lowest being 0 per cent, for encouraging children to create/make up their own music); and (2) the dominance of the first item, ‘How often do you play music to your children?’, in the ‘More than once a week, but not daily’ category (65%). It was in the focus groups that exploration of these two points revealed the reliance parents place on children’s music CDs and DVDs in the home.

When presented with the survey results, parents were not surprised by the low response rate to music activities occurring daily, citing a lack of time to daily engage in music activities with children. Parents indicated that they did value their children engaging with music, but, because of a lack of musical skills and more particularly lack of time, they tended to purchase CDs and DVDs that children could listen to or watch without an adult necessarily being present.

Six parents indicated that time devoted to music, particularly singing, tended to occur only on weekends when, as one parent stated, you ‘sit down with the kids and play and listen to music’. Two others indicated, however, that they did ‘casually’ sing along to CDs with their children in the car and at home more frequently than indicated in the survey response.

Parents also indicated they were aware, to a degree, of how their children responded to CDs and DVDs: ‘We’ve got lots of CDs and DVDs. Sometimes they listen and watch these alone or with friends, other times I might watch too … I’ll pop into their room and listen to a few songs with them, join in with their dancing and singing … they love it.’ Other parents agreed, although one did indicate, ‘But sometimes they just sit there and just blank out. On screen someone will be singing and dancing and talking to the camera, asking the children to join in, and all I see is my Tim staring at the screen.’

This comment led into discussion of CDs, and in particular DVDs, being used for entertainment: ‘They quieten the kids down, give them some down time’; or as another parent said, ‘For half an hour or more they’ll listen or sing to a CD. When you’ve got them at home all day it gives you a bit of a break to do other things.’ Parents indicated that DVDs in particular tended to ‘quieten’ children down, whereas when children played CDs they would often dance or move around and sing. Others indicated that listening to and singing along to CDs and learning the songs helped in other domains such as honing listening skills and improving literacy and numeracy. A number of parents commented on how they were surprised at how long their children would sit down and concentrate on listening to a CD of songs, leading to the conclusion that having children listen to CDs of songs ‘helps with listening skills … which they’ll need when they start school.’ CDs were often frequently valued for their focus on numeracy. For example, one parent commented: ‘There’s a lot of counting in those songs … one of Chloe’s favourite CDs is a counting song CD. We bought it for her because of the counting.’

Parents not only identified the perceived benefits of having their children use music CDs and DVDs in the home but also indicated that these were often a preferred option because of their own lack of musical skills. Comments such as, ‘Well, I can’t hold a tune, not like the Wiggles’, were indicative of parental opinion. One mother, who played the piano, talked about some of the musical games she played with her child, and the songs they sang together. The other parents indicated they would like to do this, but believed they lacked the skills and experience. One parent stated: ‘So the CDs are what I use instead. And the kids love them. The Wiggles just have tapped into something that kids love.’

There was agreement among parents on this point, which led to them indicating that CDs and DVDs featuring the Wiggles and Hi-5 as used in the home were also regularly used in preschools and childcare settings. ‘So they must be good,’ concluded one parent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Once a week or less</th>
<th>More than once a week, but not daily</th>
<th>Daily</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How often do you play music to your children?</td>
<td>4 (6%)</td>
<td>7 (11%)</td>
<td>41 (65%)</td>
<td>11 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often do you sing to or with your children?</td>
<td>13 (21%)</td>
<td>26 (41%)</td>
<td>18 (29%)</td>
<td>6 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often do you encourage musical play with your children?</td>
<td>15 (24%)</td>
<td>32 (51%)</td>
<td>7 (11%)</td>
<td>9 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often do you play instruments (bought or made) with your children?</td>
<td>20 (32%)</td>
<td>31 (49%)</td>
<td>5 (8%)</td>
<td>7 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often do you encourage your children to create/make up their own music?</td>
<td>16 (25%)</td>
<td>30 (48%)</td>
<td>17 (27%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Therefore child enjoyment of listening to and engaging with CDs was highlighted, as was the observation that such resources were also used by professional practitioners in preschools and childcare centres.

Discussion and conclusion

The focus group findings support, and further explain, the data from the initial survey. The issue of lack of parental time to engage in daily music interactions with children was not surprising, reflecting a general trend of parents spending less time with their children, owing in part to increased workplace commitments (Hamilton et al., 2003). As a result, CDs and DVDs were used as substitutes for parental music interaction. This is concerning, with literature pointing to the importance of social interaction in music-making with young children, whether that be with parents (Berger, 2003; Custodero, 2006; DeGratzer, 1999; Kelley & Sutton-Smith, 1987; Papousek, 1996; Trehub et al., 1997) or others (Lew & Campbell, 2005; Mang, 2005) such as peers. This suggests that parents, and other young children, should be actively engaging with children when they listen to CDs and listen to and watch music DVDs, as opposed to parents using these products to ‘quieter’ children down. Harrison (2004) supports this opinion in reference to children's viewing of the program Play School, which regularly features interactive music activities. She advocates adult and child watching together, thus enabling adults to be responsive to 'the opportunities that the program might offer' and to listen to the child's comments and observe responses, which can lay the foundation for revisiting and further exploration (p. 56).

This is not to suggest that parents should always rely on CDs and DVDs for children's musical experiences in the home. The importance of free musical play between adult and child, and between children, cannot be overemphasised. It is this play which can provide opportunities for scaffolding musical skills in young children (see de Vries, 2005). Singing with a young child allows for spontaneous vocal play, reworkings of known songs, movement vocalisation and vocal drama (Young, 2003) that are not always possible with music CDs and DVDs. That is, these products can constrain spontaneous musical play. In addition, the singing adult provides a more personal vocal model for the child (Forrai, 1988; Mang, 2005; Young, 2003) than a CD can provide.

There are numerous opportunities for parents to engage in daily music activities with young children without using CDs and DVDs, even with lack of time being a significant factor. For example, singing can occur at spontaneous moments during the day, such as during meal preparation or at mealtime, or as part of routines such as bath-time and at bedtime. Perhaps parents need to be made aware (or reminded) of such opportunities, along with developmentally appropriate songs they can sing with their children. Early childhood educators who are in regular contact with parents are in an ideal position to educate parents about this. If this were to occur, then perhaps the low percentage of parents singing to children regularly (63 per cent indicated never or once a week or less in the survey) might be addressed.

However, parents may be underestimating the amount of music they are providing in the home. Custodero (2006), in a study of singing practices of 10 families with young children, argues that there is more quality and quantity of singing experiences in the home than some music educators have reported; and claims to have uncovered a variety of musical practices that parents from various backgrounds engage in at home with young children. In support of this claim were comments made by parents in the focus groups in the present study indicating they did in fact sing with their children regularly, namely in the car (often singing along to a CD), which they had not thought about when responding to the survey. In the future, research might replicate the Custodero (2006) study, involving parents in keeping journals, along with researcher visits to homes to observe musical practices.

Recommendations

Parents might also be encouraged to attend and participate in music classes with their young children. Classes have the potential to provide parents with confidence, ideas and skills to implement a variety of developmentally appropriate music activities in the home. Research suggests that parental involvement in such classes is beneficial to children's musical development, as well as strengthening communication between parent and child (Berger, 2003; De Gratzer, 1999; Reynolds, 2006; Temmerman, 1998).

From the focus group discussions it appears that the use of music CDs and DVDs in the home may be an entrenched practice, as indicated with the proliferation of these products on the market, and parental lack of confidence with their own musical abilities (hence relying on these products as a substitute for their own music-making with children), and parents observing their use in preschools and childcare centres. The way these products are used in these settings should be explained to parents, emphasising they are just one of many ways that can engage young children in music.

Parents also need to be made aware of the detrimental effects these products may have on young children's musical development. In terms of product with a visual and audio component (i.e. DVDs, videos, television programs) some research suggests that some of this product is non-interactive, with visual cues deterring from musical events (Cassidy & Gerringer, 1999;
McGuire, 2002). However, de Vries (2004) found that a two-year-old’s viewing of and interaction with the program *Teletubbies*, with a parent present, promoted exploration of movement to music and vocalisation-singing, both while the program played and afterwards. Harrison (2004), in discussing *Play School*, points to the program moving beyond entertainment to child engagement and empowerment, and specifically in terms of music content allowing children to transform familiar songs and explore songs through play (p. 55).

In terms of young children’s interaction/response to music CDs without adult interaction, there is little in the way of research findings. An exception is a study of preschool children’s listening time responses to free versus directed listening (Sims, 2005). It was revealed that children did not listen significantly longer when presented with a specific task, thus suggesting that the ‘free’ listening children engage in when listening to CDs at home may well require levels of concentration and engagement equal to a ‘task’ set by an adult in directed listening.

These research findings, along with the present study, raise more questions than solutions for the use of CDs and DVDs in the home environment. Further research needs to explore the content of various CDs and DVDs to determine if they are appropriate for young children in terms of musical content, and specifically in terms of engagement of musical content. In addition, we need to know more about how children interact with and respond to these products when listening with adults, with other children, and alone. Ultimately, though, parents and educators need to remember that CDs and DVDs are no substitute for musical interaction between adult and child, particularly when it comes to singing.

References


Outdated relics on hallowed ground
Unearthing attitudes and beliefs about young children’s art

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University of New England, Australia

Although sociocultural theory challenges educators to embrace the social nature of learning, common practice in early childhood art has varied little from its traditional stance on natural art development, adult non-intervention, and the sacrosanct nature of creativity and artistic expression—outdated relics on hallowed ground. Despite mounting pressure to value social and cultural contexts of learning, popularised models of children’s artistic development suggest that young children decline in artistic capabilities with the onset of school, primarily as a result of social interactions—a U-shaped model of artistic development (Davis, 1991; Gardner, 1982). Furthermore, children are often invisible in discussions on children’s art and the value placed on their art is closely aligned with adults’ aesthetics (Pariser & van den Berg, 2001) while marginalising children’s actual experiences. Why beliefs about early childhood art remain entrenched may be best understood by exposing the intersection of the ever-evolving notions of childhood, art and child development.

Introduction

Sociocultural theory should prompt a rethink of taken-for-granted practices and generate critical debate about concepts of child development (Fleer, 2005). One area that seems particularly entrenched in its beliefs about child development is that of art education—indeed some early childhood practitioners are reluctant to regard their involvement in young children’s art experiences as teaching (McArdle, 2001; Visser, 2006). The reason for these beliefs and practices, Felicity McArdle and Barbara Piscitelli (2002) suggest, may be a result of disparate messages from literature and policy in early childhood and art education. Furthermore, despite recent advocacy for co-construction and the concept of the competent child, ‘the issue of “freedom above discipline” remains as a dominant discourse of art when compared to other curriculum areas such as literacy and numeracy’ (p. 13).

McArdle and Piscitelli (2002), using the metaphor of a palimpsest, examine layers of ideas that informed thinking in early childhood art education in the past 25 years, and note that, although Nancy Smith in the early 1980s advocated the importance of young children’s social interactions, her messages were not taken up. On the other hand, Francis Derham’s writings (1961), linked to Lowenfeld’s focus on self-expression and natural child development, have ‘dominated Australian early childhood education’ (McArdle & Piscitelli, 2002, p. 12).

The continued prominence of Derham’s book Art for the child under seven, which is published in much of its original form, is not surprising as it is touted on the Early Childhood Australia website as being ‘a practical guide based on thoroughly tested principles’. This is misleading when these principles of non-intervention, natural creativity and the inviolability of artistic expression are seriously challenged in educational forums. Such principles strongly support a view of child development unrelated to social influence and are incongruent with contemporary sociocultural perspectives.

A decade ago, Canadian Anna Kindler also recognised teacher’s reluctance to embrace reform in early childhood art. Kindler (1996) considered the complexity of theory-practice relationships and referred to four pillars of early childhood art education as myths, habits, research and policy. Kindler believed that educators often held myths about child development in art and creativity, natural development of artistic expression, art processes being more important than outcomes, and art activity as therapeutic and solitary. Elliot Eisner also outlined seven myths in art education and cautioned that ‘no one should underestimate the power of myths,
beliefs, or convictions in shaping one’s treatment of new evidence’ (1973-1974, p. 7). Kindler (1996) pointed out that, although myths were often not supported by research, habits developed from personal experience tended to inform art teaching practices.

Kindler (1996) also noted that early childhood and art education policies tended to be inconsistent and divergent. Canada does not have a national early childhood curriculum but Kindler referred to the influential US NAEYC guidelines for appropriate curriculum content and assessment in programs serving children ages 3 through 8, and noted that it failed to recognise the artistic realm (1996, p. 27). Furthermore, NAEYC policy tended to promote developmentally appropriate practice without reference to artistic development, although more recent publications do mention arts as a ‘discipline-specific’ domain (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2002). Therefore, not only did myths prevail but early childhood policy also tended to provide limited recognition of children’s artistic development or experiences.

Eisner believed that growth in theory and practice in art education required examination of ‘our beliefs with all the clarity we can muster’ (1973-1974, p. 15). However, models of young children’s art development are frequently based on beliefs that remain largely unchallenged. One prominent belief is that young children display the height of their artistic expression in early childhood and thereafter regress. Howard Gardner and Ellen Winner (1982), later supported by Jessica Davis (1991), proposed this U-shaped curve of artistic development. More recently Beverley Lambert, while acknowledging that David Pariser’s 1995 research showed the cultural bias of the U-curve findings, claimed that the ‘U-curve reflects a Western interpretation of drawing development’ (2005, p. 249). I will argue later, as others have done, that the curve has less to do with models of drawing development than it does with aesthetics and modernist art values.

Nevertheless it is widely held that ‘the child’s early prowess in graphic symbolisation seems to decline with the onset of school, submerging or disappearing by middle childhood’ (Davis, 1997, p. 132). The reasons for this are often presented as self-evident truths. For example, Rhoda Kellogg (1979) attributed the decline in drawings amongst eight-year-old children to inappropriate adult pressure, lack of positive messages and poor teaching practices.

Like previous articles (Eisner, 1973-1974; Kindler, 1996; McArdle & Piscitelli, 2002) this paper attempts to expose some of the historical underpinnings that support current beliefs and practices in early childhood art. To better understand ‘how we came to be where we are’ (Stankiewicz, 2001) in New Zealand and Australia I believe that we need to expand our view beyond ‘local’ time and place and examine some of the broader foundations upon which contemporary early childhood and art education beliefs stand. This article discusses some of the history of attitudes towards young children’s art as an intersection of ever-evolving beliefs about notions of childhood, art and child development.

**Notions of childhood**

Childhood has not always been seen as a distinct life stage and in medieval times even very young children participated in adult activity and learning. Contemporary research continues to show differences in child involvement in adult activity across geographical and cultural contexts (Rogoff & Angelillo, 2003; Rogoff, Paradise, Arauz, Correa-Chavez, & Angelillo, 2003). Childhood as such might be seen as a social construction within a cultural-historical context (Graue & Walsh, 1998).

Concepts of childhood influence social practices and attitudes across institutional, social and cultural settings. For example, in the seventeenth century, families were protective towards young innocent children; while, according to religion, children were born into original sin and easily corrupted. Jo Leeds (1989) suggests that the angel–demon dichotomy still echoes in contemporary child-centred and adult-directed approaches. Dichotomies also exist in the extremes of the natural versus nurtured approaches to artistic development. Gardner (1982) likened models of natural artistic development to one in which the child was seen as a seed with a natural kernel of artistic creativeness, needing adult protection from destructive forces, while the nurtured approach viewed the child as an abandoned seedling who required help from gifted teachers to achieve their potential.

As early philosophers and educationalists such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau focused on childhood as a distinct and important stage in life, children’s drawings became an area of interest. Nevertheless, children’s art and childhood was understood in relation to adulthood, and in 1896 English psychologist James Sully commented that ‘the infant of civilized races’ and the ‘lowest races of mankind’ were seen as being in close proximity to the animal world (Leeds, 1989, p. 95). As established aesthetic codes preceding this period valued noble themes, perfection and beauty, not surprisingly Sully regarded that ‘at no stage in this child-art can we find what we should regard as elements of artistic value; yet it has its quaint and suggestive side’ (Leeds, 1989, p. 96-97).

**Notions of children’s art**

Growing interest in childhood, coupled with a move away from romantic notions of art, proved fertile ground for theories of children’s art development. Nineteenth-century child-art theorists tended towards an interest...
in child psychology or art and aesthetics. Aesthetician Corrado Ricci studied more than 1,000 drawings and concluded that children draw what they see as important and ‘they make with signs the same sort of description that they would make with words’ (1887, in Leeds, 1989, p. 97). Ricci and fellow aesthetician John Ruskin believed that children should be offered general support but participation should be voluntary and a child’s natural manner of perception should not be contradicted. These beliefs permeate through to child-centred views of art prevalent a century later in many countries, including New Zealand (Gunn, 2000; Lewis, 1998/99; Richards, 2003b; Visser, 2006), Australia (McArle & Piscitelli, 2002), America (Eisner, 1973-1974) and Canada (Kindler, 1996).

Rodolphe Töpffer employed a more sympathetic approach to children’s art than did many of his contemporaries, and in 1827 and 1843 proposed that children’s art displayed their intentional thoughts and had inherent aesthetic qualities. He noted children’s use of both imitation and creative concepts, with the latter prevailing over the former. The intention of thought, apparent in deliberate drawing decisions, was made all the more evident when coupled with the ‘graphic ignorance of the designer’ (Töpffer, 1847, in Leeds, 1989, p. 98). Indeed, Töpffer regarded children’s spontaneous creative inventions as closer to the expression of great artists than was the work of artists displaying mere conventional skills (Wilson, 2004). However, Töpffer’s respect for what he termed the ‘rough and crude’ art of children was not to be fully embraced by society until the aesthetic revolution of modern art.

In Vienna, artist/educator Franz Cizek exhibited his collection of children’s art in a 1908 artists’ show. Thus, children’s art was elevated above the mere inspirational to that deemed worthy of exhibition. While this event was hailed as significant in the change of attitudes towards children’s art (Leeds, 1989), it is worth considering that, while adult artists owned and signed their work, children’s works neither belonged to them nor were they attributed to them as individuals. Furthermore, the view that children’s art was worthy of scrutiny in the art world was not held by all artists, then or now.

Cizek’s enthusiasm for children’s art led him to become an art teacher of young children, promoting their natural unfolding talents, and free expression unencumbered by ‘wrong’ instruction—that is vocational or technical training from their teacher. Cizek’s Juvenile Art Class, which opened in 1897 and existed under his direction for 40 years, provided an influential model for progressive art education movements, and his ideas about childhood, art education and the child as artist become widespread through his Exhibition of Children’s Art in London in 1934 and 1935. Thus, notions of childhood, children’s art and art aesthetics came together, influencing early childhood art education. Interestingly, examination of teaching styles reveals that Cizek, like his contemporaries in the child-art movements, was highly directive and his ‘guiding techniques and processes—created child art!’ (Wilson, 2004, p. 310).

While idealistic aesthetic and academic standards had previously excluded serious consideration of child art, modernist art movements of the mid twentieth century sought a new aesthetic order. The avantgarde, looking towards the inventive, primitive and expressive modes, embraced the arts of indigenous peoples, peasants and children. Children’s art received renewed interest, and provided a source of inspiration for the likes of Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee since 1911 when the Blue Rider association of artists was founded in Munich.

Many teachers may be unaware of the strong links between contemporary attitudes towards young children’s art and modernist aesthetic values. So strong is the link in Western tradition that when children progress to art forms no longer displaying ‘primitive’ drawing styles, their work is poorly regarded. For example, Charles Bleiker (1999, p. 50) suggested that when children became aware of the extent to which their drawings approximated real objects ‘unique style takes a back seat to the collective understanding of what is good and right in drawing’, and Gardner described such changes as ‘sinking into the doldrums of literalism’ (1980, p. 148).

Davis and Gardner maintained that ‘young children came to school exhibiting a certain form of mastery in symbolic representation that is all too frequently lost throughout the early years of schooling’ (1993, p. 193). As previously noted, it has been argued that drawing shows a U-shaped pattern of development, and Davis and Gardner (1993) took an emphatic view, stating that ‘the fact that most children do indeed stop drawing sometime in middle childhood is not debatable’ (p. 193). I challenge this on at least two counts. First, while this statement may reflect findings from an extensive body of research at Harvard, Davis and Gardner tend to express this as a universal truth. Their research is bound by the culture in which it is undertaken, and I doubt they have the mandate to speak for children in various other cultures and societies. Furthermore, what constitutes ‘drawing’ in the context of their research is not necessarily constant over other contexts, and to claim their view is ‘not debatable’ closes down alternative discussions.

Davis (1991) attempted to show systematic evidence for the U-shaped curve by asking artists to code 500 children’s and adults’ drawings for expression, considering balance, line and composition. These drawings were collected from six groups, and results showed that the five-year-olds’ drawings scored similar to those of adult and adolescent artists, while the eight
and 11-year-old children's drawings scored similar to the non-artists' groups. While Davis claimed support for the U-shaped model, the validity of such conclusions had previously been challenged. Four years earlier Rosenblatt and Winner suggested that modernist aesthetics influenced artists' preferences for five-year-old children's art over that of 10-year-old children (Winner, 1997). When non-artist judges were presented with drawings from the same groups, they showed no preference.

David Pariser and Axel van den Berg (2001) also challenged U-curve findings as representing cultural aesthetic judgements, rather than universal trends. They showed that Chinese judges consistently scored drawings by the youngest children below other groups, while Davis's findings reflected modernist Western aesthetics. Further investigations by Kindler, Pariser, van den Berg, Liu and Dias (2002), with adult and child judges from Brazil, Canada and Taiwan, supported this view and revealed other models. Canadian and Brazilian eight-year-old children showed a preference for the art of the next-oldest age group and produced an overall inverted U. Furthermore, the other Brazilian judges produced an upwardly tilting line that suggested a link between technical skills and aesthetic merit. Therefore, while the U-shaped curve is generally regarded as representing a Western model of artistic development, it is in fact more closely linked to modernist aesthetic values than to models of children's artistic growth. While Davis judged children's drawings, the children themselves were invisible, as were sociocultural contexts, drawing experiences and intentions. Children's responses to their own drawings were of no consequence in Davis's findings, and attributing young children's art with modernist art qualities privileges adult perspectives, as children tend to be critical of their own drawings if they lack realism or precision (Richards, 2003a, 2003b, 2004). Furthermore, the voice of the young art-maker is silenced in these models as they often do not prefer their own drawings (Kindler et al., 2002; Richards, 2003b, 2004; Rosenblatt & Winner, 1988, in Winner, 1997); and children often lack full control of the aesthetics effects they produce. Nevertheless, Davis's research and similar appeals to modernist aesthetic values have influenced attitudes towards children's art and notions of development. Just as the term 'child development' has become reified in Australia and now 'represents a static and monocultural view of children, notably Western middle-class children and their families' (Fleer, 2005, p. 7), so too do notions of artistic development.

Diana Korzenik (1981) suggested that young children's graphic representations were regarded as art because adult society took them to be so, rather than as a function of children's artistic development and expression. Brent Wilson suggests a broader view in that 'every artifact of visual culture is actually a tapestry of interwoven texts’ (2004, p. 321). Defining child art and art development is highly problematic (Kindler, 2004), but those outside of art fields, such as Roger Gehlbach (1990, p. 20), can be critical of teachers who called ‘children's earliest finger smudges’ art because they were produced in the art centre. Regarding such smudges as art, however, is not without researched precedent, most notably in Gardner’s 1980 Artful scribbles, the significance of children's drawing, and Kellogg's (1969, 1979) extensive research with children's early drawings.

Young children's drawings are frequently celebrated as artistically worthy, yet, as these children respond graphically to their visual, social and cultural world, their art-making is often deemed stilted and uncreative. That those views are widely held, and regarded as persuasive, should concern early childhood and art educators. Arguments that postulate that children's art is of less value as a result of their interactions with others and the world around them flies in the face of current sociocultural thinking. The reason for the contrary positions on valuing young children's art, and a starting point for debate, may be found in exploring some aspects of dominant notions of children's artistic development.

**Notions of children’s art development**

Children's art was generally regarded as offering insights into their thoughts and feelings, and an interest in the taxonomy of children's art was apparent into the 1920s. Drawings were often classified according to the child's gender and cultural background, suggesting theories of artistic competencies and developmental sequences. In 1905, Kerschensteiner, for example, concluded that boys were more competent than girls at drawing, based on spatial relationships (Turman, 1999).

Perhaps the most influential of this earlier work was that of G. H. Luquet, who proposed stages of development based on a theory of internal mental models (Luquet, 1913, 1927). Luquet proposed that when children ‘scribbled’ they made links between their spontaneous marks and known objects, generating ‘fortuitous realism’. This led onto deliberate mark-making, although inadequate skills produced ‘failed realism’. According to Luquet, drawings developed to display three further characteristics. First, ‘synthetic incapacity’ where a child drew parts of a drawing in seemingly unrelated placement—such as a face with eyes and ears randomly placed on the page; second, ‘intellectual realism’, where the child appeared to draw from an internal model, rather than attempt to reproduce the visually available information; third, ‘visual realism’, developed when the child was able to reproduce the visually correct aspects of a view into their drawing—such as the round top of a glass appearing as an oval.
Lowenfeld’s influence extended beyond North America and Australia. The book *Art for the child under seven*, first published in 1961, was one of the most highly read Australian early childhood documents by the end of the twentieth century (Piscitelli, 2001). The author, Francis Derham, adhered to Lowenfeld’s focus on self-expressive and naturally unfolding artistic development. Derham strongly held that, while children mature over time, this timing could not be predicted, and sometimes children regress. She believed that a child should not be urged beyond their natural developmental stage and that adult interference could ‘retard or block his [sic] mental progress’ (1961, p. 6). These views also appear in New Zealand early childhood publications. For example, McConnell (2000, p. 19) stated: ‘I believed, like Viktor Lowenfeld and W. Lambert Brittain, that, if it were possible for children to develop without interference from the outside world, no special stimulation for their creative work would be necessary.’

Herbert Read (1943), a prominent English art educator interested in Freud’s and Jung’s theories, developed stylistic criteria for classifying children’s artwork, based on Jungian categories of introversion and extroversion. Read, like Lowenfeld, promoted the affective and aesthetic aspects of children’s art and strongly promoted creative activity as an emotional outlet. At that time, when England was at war, such views inspired generations of art educators who believed that a child’s natural creative impulses must not be repressed by interfering adults. In many respects, these movements support Wilson’s premise that the term ‘child art’ is ideological and is used to promote adult causes (2004).

John Dewey’s (1958, 1966) ideas on authenticity of experience and inventiveness with materials also found a receptive audience. His philosophies, coupled with concepts of artistic self-expression promoted by Cizek, Read, Lowenfeld and others, came together so that ‘the art of childhood had come to be seen as a prototype of the human creative impulse’, and an ‘inborn creative potential was each child’s inherent legacy’ (Leeds, 1989, p. 101). Evolving notions of childhood and child art were influenced by the historical contexts of war and oppression that preceded these times, and the influence of these strong ideological positions and voices shaped young children’s education and art education.

One such voice was that of Rudolph Arnheim (1956), who incorporated the expressive and perceptive considerations of children’s drawing with cognitive-developmental considerations. Arnheim was concerned with how art related to visual perception and visual thought. He considered that children’s drawings became progressively more complex and differentiated as they realised their drawing intentions. Developing aesthetic sensitivities was seen as an important aspect of development, and many built on his ideas, including Rhoda Kellogg, Jacqueline Goodnow and Howard Gardner.

Arnheim's work provided impetus for the collection, analysis and categorisation of vast numbers of children’s drawings. The Rhoda Kellogg Child Art Collection, for example, comprised about two-million pieces collected between 1948 and 1969. Kellogg’s classifications, aligned with Gestalt theory, stressed pattern and organisation in perception. Young children’s scribbles, according to Kellogg, developed from undifferentiated forms to become simple identifiable shapes. These outline shapes were often superimposed one on another, becoming ‘combines’ (Kellogg, 1969), and over time drawings progressed from basic shapes to representational drawings.

Research into children’s art has focused to a large extent on their drawings, and to some degree on the act of drawing. The debate around children’s artistic development is not so much ‘do young children develop?’ but rather how we regard such development. For example, to what extent is artistic development an automatic consequence of maturation, or integral with social interactions; to what extent is artistic development unilinear or a complex multi-modal and multi-directional process?

Artistic development has predominantly focused on drawing development, progressing from early random mark-making to realism. However, contemporary views
recognise that realism is not necessarily the ultimate graphic goal (Kindler, 1999) and regard children's art work as involving 'a repertoire of visual languages, as well as the wit to know when to call on each' (Wolfe & Perry, 1988).

Very young children show the ability to make marks with fingers and objects—a form of solitary sensorimotor experience, according to Piaget. However, Lev Vygotsky emphasised object-oriented sensorimotor actions as shared experiences that structured the child's perception, as interaction and emotional attachment between an infant and his or her parents focused the child on separate objects and their attributes (Bodrova & Leong, 1996). Thus, while Vygotsky (1978) regarded toddlers' leading activity as object manipulation, as they explored objects as tools and separated actions from objects, traditional developmental models attributed such development to sensorimotor schema maturation. Likewise, art development theories such as those of Kellogg (1969), Luquet (1927), Goodenough (1926) and Harris (1963) supported such maturational models. However, Vygotsky suggested that when young children were able to solve problems using motor actions and perception their thinking was mediated through shared activity and language. Therefore, when young children used mark-making implements to generate increasingly complex drawings, language and social interactions were integral to this development.

Some contemporary theorists have expanded upon the link between children's art, thought and language to consider multiple ways children express pictorial representations. As such, consideration of children's art-making also concerns their intentions, cultural tools, sociocultural contexts and communications goals. For example, Kindler and Darras (1994, 1997a, 1997b, 1998), building on Pierce's semiotic theory (1931-35), regard all pictorial representational activity as having communication potential. As such, they see 'pictorial representation as a semiotic process that occurs in an interactive sociocultural environment and results in pluri-media (graphic, vocal/verbal and gestural) manifestations' (Kindler & Darras, 1998, p. 148).

Kindler and Darras draw upon both the physiological and cognitive aspects of the production of pictorial representations, identifying five forms of 'iconicity', which form a map of pictorial development (see Kindler & Darras, 1994, 1998). Rather than proposing a unilinear model, Kindler and Darras provide extensive insight into children's early gestural representations, making links between children's actions, verbalisations and their traces. Very young children acquire concepts of the relationship between their actions and the marks they make. In early childhood, they explore relationships between their gestures, developing tendencies to identify and repeat actions, and recognise similarity and difference. Kindler and Darras also consider the interplay of vocal and gestural manifestations in scribbles, recognising that young children produce drawings that relate to action and motion, rather than to static objects.

Kathy Ring and Angela Anning also recognise the interplay between drawing, physical play and action (Anning & Ring, 2004; Ring, 2003). They noted that boys not only preferred three-dimensional narrative play and drawings featuring action, movement and speed, but also that their 'action drawings became dynamic extensions of their whole body movement as the drawing tool “hit” the surface' (Anning & Ring, 2004, p. 104). Such action drawings would rank poorly on measures of realism, but when considered as part of the child's intentions or motivations they are animated and interesting. Kindler (1999) also suggests that such pictorial repertoires were intricately linked with other symbol systems, such as gestures and verbal, and their selection as a graphic representation is a deliberate one.

Sociocultural perspectives have prompted consideration of the social, cultural and historical nature of children's art experiences. Contexts other than educational settings are considered in children's artistic development (Anning, 2002), and Margaret Brooks, building on Vygotskian theories, provides rich insights into how children's learning through drawing can lead development (Brooks, 2002, 2005a, 2005b, 2006). Brooks links thought and drawing in dialectic relationship, to show how 'drawing is a powerful metacognitive tool that mediates between a child's spontaneous concepts and scientific concepts and supports higher mental functions' (Brooks, 2006, p. 63).

However, despite challenges to value a wider range of repertoires and sociocultural contexts and perspectives, traditional art development theories still dominate teaching resources. For example, on the University of Florida website it is stated that 'a number of developmental models have been offered over the years to explain what occurs with respect to children's artistic development. While these models sometimes vary (e.g. in the number of proposed stages), they all propose a similar pattern of development—one of progressing from scribbling to realistic representation' (University of Florida, 2007). In an early childhood educational climate of developmentally appropriate practice, where learning is regarded as following development, these theories suggest developmental benchmarks. Combined with a focus on artistic self-expression, young children's artistic development is commonly regarded as progressing towards realism, naturally occurring and best left unhindered. These perspectives must be challenged in forums accessible to teachers and parents.
Summary

Despite calls to consider the social nature of learning, beliefs such as natural artistic development, adult non-intervention, and the importance of creativity and artistic expression continue to dominate beliefs and attitudes about children’s art. Ironically, historical perspectives reveal that esteemed models of children’s art often evolved from structured adult guidance, and were valued more for their links to adult art than to children’s art-based experiences or opinions. Widely circulated models of artistic development suggest that young children’s artistic capabilities decline with the onset of school, largely because of inappropriate adult influences. While this view was supported by the U-shaped curve of artistic development, other research suggests that this model has more to do with modernist aesthetics values than drawing development.

Despite some alternative perspectives, artistic development is often regarded as a linear progression, linked to notions of creativity and adult definitions of ‘art’. These beliefs and attitudes permeated over a century of valuing children’s art for its naive style, as a source of inspiration, and as an antidote to oppression. Intersecting with these factors were theories of education psychology and learning. Of particular impact were Luquet’s art development theories, which were built on by Piaget, and developmental theory developed from extensive taxonomy of children’s drawings. Thus these powerful influences, which are both unconsciously and consciously embraced in current everyday early childhood practice and beliefs, compete with more contemporary sociocultural approaches. In this paper I would argue that, as long as educators regard traditional and often outdated beliefs about children’s artistic growth as sacred relics on hallowed ground, then early childhood art practices will become fossilised, and what we hold to be important for young children to experience and express in and through the visual arts will be lost.

Where to from here?

Articulating a coherent, comprehensive theory of development in art is fraught with obstacles (Kindler, 2004). However, early childhood educators need to challenge their own taken-for-granted attitudes towards young children’s art development and enter into energetic debate about the nature of artistic growth, experience and creativity. Current attitudes celebrate young children’s art as ‘creative’, but as these same children increasingly respond to social influences their work is denigrated. While these beliefs reinforce a non-intervention response on behalf of teachers, this is inconsistent with contemporary sociocultural early childhood curriculum, such as the New Zealand early childhood curriculum, Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996).

Understanding the historical underpinnings of beliefs about early childhood art goes some way towards charting a new course. Not only must New Zealand and Australia keep abreast of current art education research, such as that in the International handbook of research in the arts (Bresler, 2007), but we must seek to have our own voices heard on national and international stages. In reconciling our sociocultural perspectives with early childhood art education practices we need to acknowledge that creativity and development do not cancel each other out (as the outdated relics suggest); rather they are dialectically related (Vygotsky, 1978). We need to construct robust networks, promoting research and debate that builds a better understanding of the social and interactive nature of children’s art experience and the role of educators. Robbins (2005), however, suggests that a major issue with dominant research methods is that children are frequently portrayed as anonymous and decontextualised, with little apparent relation to children’s everyday lives. Furthermore, Wilson acknowledges that in art research ‘the interpretations and narratives of young people are seldom documented’ (2004, p. 323). What is called for, if we are to build a contemporary understanding of young children’s artistic development and teachers’ roles is research that honours children’s art as related to real people, in real contexts, leading real lives.

References


Conceptions of art in Hong Kong preschool children

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THIS PAPER REPORTS PART of a phenomenographic inquiry into arts education in early childhood. Research studies into how young children understand and conceive their early arts experiences are limited. In documenting children's views, this study contributes to an understanding of arts education in a preschool context, and raises possibilities for improving arts pedagogy. Twenty-seven young children aged five to six, studying in the same class at a Hong Kong preschool, participated in the study. Through semi-structured interviews, the children were asked to describe their art experiences in preschool. The children's conceptions of their experiences fell into five categories: (1) Art is human nature, (2) Art is a task, (3) Art is a process, (4) Art is a product, and (5) Art is a mystery.

Introduction

THERE IS A GROWING BODY of research into young children and the arts. Hamblen (1989, cited in Zimmerman, 1996, p. 8) notes that most research focuses on children's behaviours and their developing artistry, and takes little account of what is actually taught in arts programs. Likewise, Piscitelli (1997) finds that children's art is studied mainly in three areas: (i) children's development in drawing and painting, (ii) artistic development in children, and (iii) ways to enhance cognition and creativity. Freedman (2004) regards drawing development as the most researched topic in art education. Research has also highlighted the so-called theory–practice gap between what teachers believe about arts education and what is evident in their work of teaching young children (e.g. Baker, 1994; Bresler, 1992, 1995; McArdle, 2001; Milbrandt, 2002). The growing number of voices adds to the conversation around arts education regarding its quality, effectiveness, benefits and outcomes. So far, however, there is only a small number of studies which have actually included the voices of children in this conversation (e.g. Jeffers, 1998; Johnson, 1982; Stokrocki, 1986; Kindler & Darras, 1997; Kindler, Darras & Kuo, 1998, 2000). The focus of most of these research studies goes beyond the immediate experience, and seeks to examine other factors, such as the learning impact, or cultural or ethnic differences in the experience of art.

This paper reports on part of a study designed to explore young children's experiences and conceptions of art in a Hong Kong preschool. The larger study also looked at this from the teachers' perspectives, but what follows is an account of the children's views (for more on this study, see Wong, 2007).

The study

This study employed the phenomenographic research approach. Phenomenography focuses on identifying and describing the qualitative variations in individuals' experiences of a particular phenomenon (Marton, 1986). The approach assumes that people vary in assigning meaning to a phenomenon, and that the meaning they ascribe governs subsequent behaviour.

The data is the understandings and experiences of learning art from the perspectives of the children. There were 27 children, aged five to six years, who attended a Hong Kong preschool. The preschool could be said to be typical of those in Hong Kong with regard to the curriculum, resources and teachers' qualifications. It was located in the western part of Hong Kong Island, and provided a whole-day service for children aged from two to six, all from middle-class families. The preschool employed a thematic approach in its
curriculum planning. Every Monday the teachers would introduce a special theme-related artwork task. Children had to complete the task within the week in their own time. Children were allowed to work in the art corner in the classroom which was set out as a free-choice activity on a daily basis.

Semi-structured interviews were designed to highlight the individual experience of art education (Bruce, 1994; Entwistle, 1997; Walsh, 2000). Through the interviews, the children were provided with a platform to express their conceptions of art.

Both individual and group interviews were used. Group interviews allowed more dynamic opportunities to collect children's views, not only directly through their conversations with the researcher, but also indirectly from their interactions with their peers. Group interviews took place in the art corner in the classroom while the children were working. The interviews usually started with 'What kind of art are you doing today?', 'How do you learn to make it (art)?', 'Why are you making art?' The researcher had only to provide children with a few questions to encourage them to express themselves and to prompt less expressive children to join in the conversation. Individual interviews were conducted in a quiet corner in the preschool; each child was interviewed for approximately 15 minutes, and each was asked to show his/her portfolio and the artwork made during the group interviews. They were asked to talk about other art experiences in preschool, including the reasons for making art. Nine sets of group and individual interviews were conducted.

The data collected through interviews was organised into 'categories of description' or conceptions (Marton, 1981). All the ideas expressed by the participants were taken into consideration. Researchers' prior and personal assumptions were to be set aside. Responses from different participants were grouped according to similarities and organised in subcategories.

Findings

Conducting conversations with young children about their understanding of arts experiences can be difficult. However, the children did articulate a range of responses during the many conversations. In grouping the similarities and differences, five conceptions of art emerged from the analysis of the conversation transcripts.

Conception 1: Art is human nature

The main feature of this conception is that making art is natural. Children with this conception perceive art-making as one of their basic instincts or aptitudes and consider that every human has the innate ability to make art.

John: How do I learn? ... I just draw and colour, and I learn ... I know how to colour since I was born.

Other children could not remember how they learned to draw. Knowing how to draw was intuitive.

Children indicated that they have an innate desire to make art.

Peter: I do it when I want to. I draw and colour-in whenever I want to.

Winnie: I love to draw ... I can draw something very complicated ... that is to draw some very, very complicated pictures.

The children also expressed the idea that art can comfort them and they can express themselves through art-making. They referred to the possibilities of recording, representing or communicating issues, ideas, objects and experiences in their daily lives by drawing. In this way, art is a form of communication, just as drawings in caves were during ancient times. There is an understanding among children that the drawings can be used to represent items, objects or people.

Conception 2: Art is a task

In this conception, children talked about the work aspects of the activity. The focus was on teachers' commands and following classroom routine. For these children, art was seen as an activity offered by the teacher to occupy their time. Some children considered art as one of the activities in the classroom used to keep them busy or to prevent them from playing with toys.

The children saw art activities as being part of the schooling system, and just one of the learning activities in preschool. Art was viewed as a task that teachers set for children, who must closely follow the teachers' instructions.

Jim: The teacher asked me to draw ... you have to work during the group activity time.

For some of the children, art was not their first priority if they had a choice of classroom activities. These children suggested that they went into the art corner while waiting for their turn to join small group teaching sessions or to play with their favorite toys. They regarded art as something teachers used to keep them busy and engaged, and as a transition activity in their daily routine.

Connie: If there are some new toys, I will play with the toys. I will draw then ... when someone else is playing with my favourite toys.

Andy: There is no seat for me to do the writing [so I draw].
Children also expressed their dependence on others in terms of art-making, and showed a reluctance to make art on their own. They said they did not know how to make art unless directed. The instruction provided by the teacher was important. The children showed minimal desire and confidence in making art on their own. Motivation was extrinsic.

Jenny: Teachers help me to draw the circle pattern. Then we make the dots and cut it out … she draws the circle [the spiral] and then we draw and cut it … She is afraid that we don’t know how to draw.

In this conception, the content of the art was not important. Rather, children focused on following instructions.

**Conception 3: Art is a process**

The distinguishing feature of this conception is the interaction with others. Here, art-making is a social occasion for the children. The nature and the content of the art activities is not the most important thing, but rather the process of making art enables the child to get close to or be in the company of friends. The focus is on the time that children spend with their friends. The children look at each other’s drawings and discuss what is to be drawn and the colours to be used. Sometimes the children teach one another to draw. Not only do they learn from each other in this process, they also view imitating good friends’ artworks as a technique to maintain friendships.

Connie: I have to follow this picture to do the colouring … because she [her friend] said so … because I think my friend’s picture is very beautiful … ‘Linda [her friend], what’s to draw next? Let’s give them a crown’ … I love to follow Linda’s picture. Because I always play with her.

Interaction is an effective way to learn to make art. It involves the processes of ‘show and tell’ and imitation. Children exchange ideas among themselves, and can learn from a wide range of people—parents, siblings and peers. Adult and peers can take on the role of ‘teacher’. In particular, children cherish close interpersonal contact with adults and see this contact as enhancing their relationship with that person.

John: My dad taught me how to draw. He taught me by holding my hand … [I like this way] because I don’t have to draw by myself.

While some arts educators would be surprised at parents holding their children’s hands to guide the drawing process, it is interesting to note the child’s enjoyment of the close personal interaction.

Children see their art-making as part of a process of achievement through practice—‘learning by doing’—and suggest that, if they keep trying and practising, they will learn to manage the materials or skills.

Connie: Just try. [If you] fail the first time, then try the second time. [If you] fail the second time, then try the third time.

**Conception 4: Art is a product**

Sometimes children linked their experience of art to a product. Children talked about the ideas presented in their artwork as something that originated from themselves. They regarded their art products as an expression and representation of their fondness for others, and as having functional purposes such as gifts for others or decorations. Significantly, children reflected on their sense of the aesthetic and understanding of the elements of art. They believed that, if they want to make beautiful artworks, they have to concentrate, be involved and work hard. They also emphasised their need for recognition and for others’ appreciation of the aesthetic qualities of their art.

Drawing is a language of visual representation, and children use this language to share their ideas about experiences in their lives. Often these experiences are drawn from popular culture. In their free drawing session, the children tended to draw the things they like.

Andy: I am drawing the Digimon.

Steven: It’s Digimon; he likes to draw them.

Children referred to their artwork as having two functions—gifts and decoration. Products included colouring-in, drawings and collages of images cut from magazines. Children use these works to express their appreciation and love for others, including teachers, parents, siblings and friends. The content and quality of the work seem not to be their main concerns; they just want to make something they can give to others. Children holding this conception do not seem to regard their products as art, but rather as gifts or decorations.

Connie: When you finished your work, you can do the colouring or cutting for Mummy and Daddy.

Sam: Because I have to cut it for my friend … he just wanted it so much … he is in my group, and Fei is the same group.

The children are taught or asked to make certain artefacts to match the teaching theme or the coming festival.

Heidi: To ‘make up’ the classroom … to decorate the classroom.

Vincent: It’s Lunar New Year; have to be beautiful.

Children appeared to understand that some artwork is ‘better’ than others. It is interesting to note children’s criteria for aesthetic judgment. For these children, it appears that if one wants to make good artefacts, one has to concentrate, be involved and apply a good deal
of effort. Children see tidiness, colour and the artist's attitude as the criteria for aesthetic judgment. The fact that one puts more colours into one's picture means that one is willing to spend more time, make more effort and work harder on it. Children relate the art product achieved to the processes involved in making it.

To some children, a good picture should be neat and tidy. Yanny: I have drawn something wrong so I need a rubber … it's out of the space-line … we don't like it to be out of the space-line. Another criterion of good pictures is how colourful it is. John: His work is not good. Because he did not colour it.

Some children suggest that you will make a good artwork if you concentrate. They suggest that concentrating and doing things slowly will pay off in terms of the outcome. Connie: I pay effort and concentrate to draw … the teacher said so. Heidi: Be concentrated and work hard. If one is concentrated and pays effort, one will draw slowly. Draw slowly and I know that I concentrate and pay effort on it.

There are also children who judge the aesthetic quality of the art according to ownership. For these children, art activities of the children's own choice produce better results. This suggests that the sense of ownership to the activity and product is essential in judging art. Larry: The teachers always ask me to make art, but I like drawing. I think it's more beautiful … most of them [assigned work] are not beautiful.

Children show a pride in their work and spell out the importance of adults' recognition of their efforts. Some suggest that, at times, parents do not show respect for their child's artwork and do not care how the child feels.

Interviewer: Do you think that art is important? Andy: Not important at all. Because when I finish, I take it home. Mummy and Daddy throw it away. Peter: I'd rather not to make art. Because when I take it home, it becomes mouldy and Daddy will throw it away. Andy: … waste my effort.

Larry: You can tell Mummy that 'this picture is good; let's keep it'. Connie: Sometimes she said it was beautiful, sometimes she said it was ugly. I think that she was angry because my drawing was ugly … I hide it somewhere … not to let others see … if the drawing was good, Mum would say, 'Show Dad when he comes back.'

Conception 5: Art is a mystery

In this final conception, children articulate a number of contradictions and inconsistencies they notice about art. First, art-making is viewed as a task that is mainly only relevant for young children and is so time-consuming that it should only be done during spare time. They claim that grown-ups do not participate because they are too busy. They also point out that, in primary school, children have to study and no longer have time for making art. Second, art is two-sided—both fun and a chore. When art is a chore, it is best finished quickly to get it out of the way. Children holding this conception do not enjoy art activities. Finally, children do not think art is important compared to other subjects, and so cannot understand why they have to work on art at school.

For children holding this conception, art relates to leisure and is only for children who have enough spare time to make art. Parents and teachers appear to be people who do more serious 'work'. Art for these children seems to be something which is not really important, necessary or serious for life.

Andy: There is not any art-making in the primary … because primary only has homework, so there is no art … there is less homework in preschool and more homework in the primary. Kerry: [Primary has] art and craft lessons … my eldest brother told me. Tom: Because I saw my brother did it [art] … because the teacher asks you to [make art].

Some children perceive that adults make art only if that is their duty, such as artists.

Nick: My dad and mum do not draw. Because they are busy. John: Artists can draw a teddy bear on the computer. Simon: Artists can teach drawing. For example, someone does not know how to draw, [artists] can teach them.

This conception also refers to children's confusion regarding the contradiction between Conception 1, Art is human nature, and 2, Art is a task. Since art is human nature, there should be freedom to choose when to make art and what to make. However, as art is also work at school and a task to be completed, children have to make art as directed, and it becomes a chore. At these times the children work without personal purpose, and they focus on following instructions. They do not enjoy these art experiences and even express their hatred of art, suggesting that there are some materials or activities they do not like. The children suggest that they are forced to make art, and they are quite confused about this.
Steven: The teacher forces us … forces us to make this artwork.

Yvonne: If you don’t make it and let Ms Lee know that, you will be punished.

Heidi: You will be scolded, not punished. The teacher asks you to do it. But if you don’t make any, the teacher will scold you.

Peter explains the reason he dislike some of the art activities because of the materials being used.

Peter: This is not my favourite. It is so difficult … I don’t like. I don’t like putting my finger into the glue.

Even when children are tired and bored, they have to continue with their tasks. They say they approach this chore by completing the work as soon as possible.

Peter: We want to finish it as soon as possible.

Larry: Because if I get it done, I don’t have to do it any more.

Andy: Me too. I can play tomorrow … it’s tough.

Children relate the importance of the activities to their frequency. They have to write every day, so writing must be more important. The messages they are receiving from teachers are contradictory and so art becomes a real mystery to them, especially given the emphasis on writing in their future schooling.

Connie: Writing is more important than art. Because I am going to study in the primary school very soon.

Connie: I like drawing. To do the writing, you have to do it pretty fast. Finish the writing, then you can draw.

Connie: If the teachers think that we have time, they will teach us art.

Andy says art is fun and we should let children make art. However, art is not important as it is not seen as being useful anywhere else.

Andy: I think that art is not important. It cannot put out the fire.

Andy: [Should children draw?] [nods his head] It is fun.

Interviewer: Why do children need to draw?

Steven: So that you can draw this when you grow up.

Interviewer: Is art important?

Steven: Of course not. Writing, teaching [is more important].

Discussion

Preschool children’s conceptions of art, as emerging from the interviews, have been outlined here. The children in the study have expressed a variety of feelings, views, relations and associations in their thinking. Nonetheless, differences in emphasis are apparent, and the children’s conceptions range from innate desire and ability (Art is human nature), classroom practice (Art is a task, Art is a process, Art is a product) to conflicting values of art (Art is a mystery).

Children receive contradictory messages about art. They see that it is important that they engage in art activity, but feel that art is not important in the bigger scheme of learning (see Davis & Gardner, 1993; McArdle, 2001; Wright, 2003). If relationships between the children’s conceptions of art could be established and developed, this would contribute to the improvement of the quality of art education. For example, some children express their dislike of particular materials (e.g. glue, bubble-blowing). When teachers insist on the use of these materials, art becomes a ‘misery’ for these children. If teachers were to provide such children with a wider range and choice of materials, the art experience could be improved, and the children encouraged and supported in their development.

This study employs phenomenography, a relatively new research method in both the field of art education and early childhood education. For instance, large quantitative studies such as those included in the Champions of Change report (Fiske, 1999) have provided strong evidence to support the value of arts-rich programs in schools. They have done this by measuring changes in children’s academic achievements, and linking the improvements directly to arts-rich programs. Other researchers, such as Wright (2003), have conducted detailed analysis into children’s drawings and their symbol systems. Studies such as these can inform our understandings about children’s use of art as language, as a means of expression, and as a way of knowing. But there have been few research studies which actually include the children’s own perspectives on their experiences of arts learning. By recording children’s voices, and by providing points for comparative analysis across cultures, the findings in this study add to the growing body of research into arts education, and also, through the Hong Kong cultural context, provide an added dimension to the literature.

Insights into young children’s conceptions of art can make a substantial difference to considerations of pedagogical practices in art. For example, Edwards, Gandini and Forman (1998) have had considerable impact on early childhood pedagogical practices through their work in documenting children’s thinking. This study can help teachers to appreciate the importance of understanding art activities from the children’s point of view. The
ongoing debates around child-centred/teacher-directed curriculum, approaches and pedagogy in art and early childhood education can be further informed by this study, which indicates that some balance between teacher control/direction and sensitivity to children's actual experiences would seem to be important to children, thus reinforcing other researchers' views (e.g. Bresler, 1992; Kindler, 2000). This study also stimulates teacher educators, early childhood educators and art educators to reflect on their current practice.

Phenomenographic methodology could be adopted by reflective practitioners and applied across any area of the curriculum. For those teachers who seek to plan their programs around children's interests, it is imperative that they have some understanding of children's conceptions of art education experiences. Teachers who seek to provide quality arts programs will be interested in children's developing artistry; and this study should assist in their reflections on their own and the children's conceptions of art, by showing how these conceptions might match and how they might differ. Finally, this study extends the possibilities for applying the discursive phenomenographic approach to the field of art and early childhood education.

References


Young children’s meaning-making through drawing and ‘telling’
Analogy to filmic textual features

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Young children’s meaning-making through drawing and ‘telling’ is a multifaceted, complex experience, where thought, body and emotion unite. Rich and intricate creations are brought to life through children’s formation, communication and interpretation of ‘signs’ which stand for or represent something else. The term drawing-telling is used to describe children’s use of a range of signs when depicting imaginary worlds on paper, on the topic of what they think the future might be like. Such depictions include an expansive range of signs—narration, gesture, graphic depiction, onomatopoeia—often used in highly interactive ways.

This paper illustrates, through examples of young children’s drawings and transcripts of their ‘tellings’, the intertextual nature of their work. It foregrounds how adults must be sensitive to children’s shifts between various subject positionings and the multiple functions that may be assigned to their depicted objects and events. Similarities between drawing-telling and filmic textual features are featured to assist adults in understanding children’s meaning-making.

**Introduction**

We seem as a species to be driven by a desire to make meanings: above all, we are surely homo significans—meaning-makers. (Chandler, 2002, p. 17)

Young children are meaning-makers par excellence. They use many signs to create meaning and to represent reality within the medium of drawing-telling. Their artistic communication involves a combination of both verbal and non-verbal texts, such as artworks which incorporate narration, music that has lyrics, or dance which includes expressive vocalisation. So, in a broad sense, such texts are an ‘assemblage of signs’ (Chandler, 2002, p. 3).

In children’s drawing, for example, the assembled signs can include graphically produced images (e.g. people, objects), which might also include written letters or words, numbers, symbols (e.g. flags) and graphic devices (e.g. ‘whoosh’ lines behind a car). In addition, this graphic content may be accompanied by children’s sounds (e.g. expressive vocalisation) and imitative gestures to enhance the meaning. Hence, when children draw, they construct and interpret a range of verbal and non-verbal signs with reference to the conventions associated with this medium of communication.

Yet children appear to unconsciously and quite naturally violate the conventions of the medium of drawing-telling, and the results are frequently delightful. Perhaps this is related to children’s proclivity to cross channels of communication. They rely on communication which is bodily based, iconic, basic and expressive. In this sense, artistic communication is the literacy par excellence of the early years of child development. It often occurs prior to the acquisition of the skills of reading and writing and, indeed, it underpins, assists and enhances these later-attained forms of literacy. This is evidenced by the sophisticated and abstract levels of understanding and expression that occur through young children’s drawings and other forms of artistic expression.

The affordances of the medium of drawing, combined with the medium of telling, allow each of these symbolic domains to enrich and inform the other (Kendrick & McKay, 2004; Thompson, 1995; Wright, 2003a, 2005). Yet the laws that govern the articulation of meaning in the arts are different from the laws of syntax that govern language. Meaning-making in art can be either verbal or non-verbal, or both, because it involves a wide range of representational texts that can be communicated in diverse ways. These artistic texts are depicted and interpreted specially, involving complex and abstract connections between ‘signs’. As a result, children are
liberated through art to invent worlds in other-worldly ways, in a similar way to that of adult artists.

Drawing-telling gives children the opportunity to create and share meaning using two modes, which embrace distinctive features in the following ways:

(a) non-verbal: graphic depiction (stemming from imagery and visual-spatial memory); bodily-kinaesthetic communication through enaction and expressive gesture (stemming from motor memory)

(b) verbal: telling the drawing (talking about the drawing’s characters, objects, events, sequencings, graphic details or other relevant characteristics, which often includes onomatopoeia i.e. the use of a word or vocal imitation of the thing or action designated).

Such crossover of modes increases children’s capacity to use many forms of representational thinking and to mentally manipulate and organise images, ideas and feelings. As Cox (2005) describes it:

talk and drawing interact with each other as parallel and mutually transformative processes. Sometimes the talk feeds into the drawing with the verbalized intention being transformed into drawing. Sometimes the drawing feeds into talk; the drawing intention is transformed into talk. Sometimes these processes are apparently concurrent. (p. 123)

The children’s creative processes and representational practices are actualised through the open-ended resources offered through drawing. A blank page and coloured pens can become anything. Consequently, the medium of drawing-telling provides infinite possibilities, rather than ‘a pre-determined set of options’ (Harris, 1996, p. xi).

Our understanding of children’s meaning-making within open-ended frameworks helps us become sensitive to children’s ‘processes of production’ and to their ‘authorial intentions’ (Chandler, 2002, p. 210). Such receptiveness unleashes our awareness of how things are being represented by the children, rather than only what is represented (Eisner, 2002; Hodge & Kress, 1988). As Eisner (2002) reminds us:

How something is said is part and parcel of what is said. The message is in the form-content relationship, a relationship that is most vivid in the arts.

Hence, observing children drawing requires an empathy with them, and a sensitivity to their artistic processes in relation to the demands of the medium. As Forman (1994) reminds us, each medium has inherent constraints and affordances which influence children’s thinking, processes and outcomes. The medium of drawing, for instance, requires thinking in terms of the visual qualities offered through mark-making using paper and pencil (or pen, crayon or other drawing tools on other drawing surfaces).

When children interact with the drawing medium, there is reciprocity between the child and the materials (Kolbe, 2000). As observers, we need to be conscious that drawings can serve various purposes and functions; we must try to understand the young artist’s goals in relation to these. For instance, the purpose of a drawing may be to represent a bird, or perhaps the flight path of a bird; a mark may function as showing a likeness of a bird, a person, an object, a letter, a number, a movement, a sound or a range of other meanings. Therefore we need to look for both the ‘reason’ and the ‘meaning’ of the child’s work (Scruton, 1996) (e.g. how the child’s various marks may be distinguished and ascribed particular meaning).

To do so, we must be receptive to the child’s drawing processes—what he or she is trying to do. This does not mean attending to just the graphic strategies and skills the child uses when drawing, or the resulting end-product. Instead, focus should be upon the processes of the activity—the independent and interfaced components of the graphic, narrative and embodied dimensions of the child’s experience. These dimensions should also include the context in which the drawing occurred, and other aspects that may be linked to the drawing: social activities, personal experiences or intertextual influences such as TV, films, comic books or computer games.

Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that, whether the adult is simply observing or actively engaging with the child during the drawing process, the very presence of an adult serves as a form of facilitation. The observer can protract (or perhaps even thwart) the process. Consequently, dialogue between adult and child must be sensitively considered.

Dialogue must be aligned with an awareness of the cross-channel communication of children’s drawing, and how children learn not only how to differentiate and consolidate the separate meanings of various forms of symbolising, but also to see connections between them (Dyson, 1986, 1992). Indeed, some preschool children confuse the terms ‘draw’ and ‘write’ or use these terms interchangeably, which would suggest that they do not differentiate between the meaning-making potential of these two symbol systems, as illustrated in the following comment by a preschool boy:

This [the act of drawing] is how I write. Just how big adults draw [write]. You should see the legs I’m going to write [draw].

When preschool children want to write their names or the titles of their works, they may describe the process of writing as drawing, as illustrated in the comments of two girls:
And I’ll write my name on it. I’ll draw [write] it up here [top of page]

How do you draw [write the words] ‘Not the Future’?

Such descriptions of their symbolic processes, as they unfold, give a temporal quality to children’s acts of meaning. What’s more, their graphic intentions often are announced in advance, which implies, ‘OK, are you watching now? Here I go.’ Hence, the act of, say, ‘building [drawing] a house’, becomes a visual telling of a foretold event—like a silent narration.

In addition, children often integrate their graphic-verbal tellings of events, objects or characters with:

- touching the page (e.g. to feature objects, locate content or to affectionately ‘identify’ with a character, such as stroke the figure’s hair)
- gesture (e.g. to enact an event, imitate something to enhance the telling, or ‘move’ an object or character across the page)
- onomatopoeia (i.e. sound effects or vocal imitations of things or actions).

As Siegel (1995) points out, when connections are invented between visual-spatial, auditory and bodily-kinesthetic channels such as this, the content of one sign system is mapped onto the expression plane of another. During cross-channel communication, children effortlessly weave between many forms of symbolising and select what and how they want to represent something. In other words, they choose the system which is most effective for a particular form of communication at a particular time (Kendrick & McKay, 2004; Short, Kauffman & Kahn, 2000). In the process, they shift fluidly between texts and simultaneously use many systems of signs, such as words, images, sounds and gestures. This is known as intratextuality.

**Intratextuality**

Intratextuality involves relations within the text. For example, to clarify or enhance the content of an activity, a child’s drawing might include labelled items/events, thought/word bubbles attached to characters, or ‘whoosh’ lines behind a vehicle/character to represent movement. In such cases, the drawing is similar to a newspaper photograph with a caption, a cartoon comic, a narrated film or an ad. Barthes (1977, 38ff) and Bolter (1991, pp. 195-196) discussed how symbols, such as graphics with labels, can help to ‘anchor’ the text within a medium, similar to how equipment installation instructions, for instance, might have drawings with captions to clarify assemblage sequences.

So what we may choose to regard as discrete text can, in fact, lack clear-cut boundaries. Children’s drawings-tellings are abundant with examples of intratextuality, where the visual text becomes anchored through symbols such as the child’s written name, the labelling of specific content, or the use of speech bubbles or ‘whoosh’ lines. Each of these is illustrated below.

**Naming and labelling**

For young children, the signs of drawn figures and written letters are often given equal aesthetic and symbolic importance. For instance, in one preschool boy’s (5.4 [five years, four months]) work, which included representations of himself, his parents and his dog, the lettering for his name (Liam) is as prominent as the human and animal figures. The significance of his use of both symbol systems is emphasised in his telling of the content.

![Image 1.](image1.png)

I want to write my name and this [these figures] here … I’m writing an A’, first, and then a ‘I L’. Oh, I’ve done the wrong thing. L I A A … there.

Some children feature their names using large lettering and multiple colours, placing these in focal positions on the page. The colourful, decorative qualities of the lettering can give the words prominence and equivalent symbolic status to the graphic content. Particularly for children who are just learning to write, or have done so relatively recently, both the drawn images and the written letters have comparable meaning-making significance.

In the example below, the decorative letters provide aesthetic appeal, and there is a sense of balance between the ‘M’ in Megan’s (6.3) name and the shape and position of the cloud in the rainforest underneath.

![Image 2.](image2.png)
The interplay between images and words is also foregrounded when children label figures and objects, as illustrated in the example below by a preschool boy (5.3). The words ‘cat’ and ‘dog’ are written beside the two larger profile-oriented animals.

Image 3.

And I can write ‘cats’ and ‘dog’ and ‘Mop’ and ‘Mill’. I can write any kind of word. I can’t write every word, just some words.

In a further example (below), the name Reuban is added in close proximity to figures to stand for the artist himself. Reuban (5.2) asked an adult to write his name and the word ‘backhoe’. ‘Backhoe’ served both as a label for the object and a description of the event (i.e. ‘doing backhoeing’), which is reflected in a segment of a dialogue between the child and an adult [‘A’ stands for the adult’s comments, and ‘C’ for the child’s]. Reuban had an ‘Aha!’ moment when he looked at both words and saw the connection between the letters in the word backhoe and in his name Reuban.

Image 4. Reuban the Backhoe Digger

C: Put my name there [‘Reuban’, far right].
A: [The adult obliges.] Well, that’s your name, but what is the picture going to be called?
C: Well I’m telling you what I mean. I want to put the name of what I am doing [seems annoyed] … of what the things are. Now put ‘backhoe’ just here [points].

[Notes the writing of ‘backhoe’]. Huh! Backhoe’s got one of the bits of my name in it [the letters ‘ba’].

In summary, children often use letters to add their names to their work or to label particular content within their drawings. These techniques serve to anchor the text and to foreground a preferred reading of the visual content. Similarly, speech bubbles and ‘whoosh’ lines provide anchorage in relation to characters’ spoken language and objects’ or characters’ movement within the drawing-telling.

Speech bubbles and ‘whoosh’ lines

Many children use ‘whoosh lines’, often accompanied by gesture, to represent movement. In the example below (eight-year-old boy), the ‘overall rhetorical orchestration’ (Chandler, 2002, p. 202) of the work comes alive through:

- the lines behind the jet and the cars, above the opening back door of the truck, below the helicopter and between the plane and helicopter
- the word bubbles (i.e. ‘zzz’) above the snoozing drivers in the suspended cars.

Through such devices, the lines animate the frozen images of the still, 2D format, and the word bubbles ‘audiate’ the silent action. They ‘articulate’ (Metz, 1974, p. 242) with the objects, characters and events to bring the artworks ‘alive’.

Image 5.

A: Here’s a big semi, is it?
C: Yeah. And some carrying cars, in case you’re tired … you just get hooked up by it and have a rest.
A: They have numbers on them, do they? Oh no, they’re not numbers. They just look like number twos from here. They’re snoring, are they? Oh [laughs] they’re the people in there snoring. Right, so they’re resting.
C: Yeah.

The animation/audiation of the artwork is similar to the interaction of film with soundtrack. It collectively
contributes to the vibrant nature of the drawing-telling, and reveals relationships and patterns that contribute to the generation of meaning. The multiple codes interact in a complementary way and cannot be considered in isolation. Such integration is what makes these works dynamic enactments.

**Dynamic enactment**

Children use terms such as ‘do’ to suggest a real-time event in the making—a live enactment unfolding on paper. For instance, Joel (6.4) said, ‘and I’ve still got to do the person’ [who is chasing the dog who is chasing the pig]. (See below.)

![Image 6. Joel the Policeman](image)

**Image 6. Joel the Policeman**

C: That’s a pig. And it ... they’re trying to catch the pig because it keeps on hurting people.

The word ‘do’ suggests a form of personal participation, as if Joel were roleplaying the event, being the character running after the dog and pig—‘doing’ the person running. Through such doing, objects, characters and events become constructed, and layers of content and relationships emerge—a representational message is ‘brought to life’ on the page. Hence, the graphic representations of events are not static messages.

Indeed, there are many implicit interactions (object-object, object-people and people-people) that are meant to be understood as being dynamic events. This is illustrated in two details from the drawing below of a sequence of events depicting a car crash on a futuristic planet. Michael (8.5) presented this as if he were narrating and storyboarding a sci-fi film. He used several words to describe the energetic involvement of cars and other objects, which are emphasised in the transcript.

![Image 8. Michael the Sci-Fi Storyboarder](image)

**Image 8. Michael the Sci-Fi Storyboarder**

C: And this is a roadway now. The road is like a tunnel type of thing.

A: A tunnel type thing. Is part of it underground?

C: Yeah, what it is is a tunnel so the cars can just go through the tunnel. They got [inaudible] cars that hover above the ground about eight centimetres ... All the cars they run ... what do they run on? ... Grass. [Adds green ‘whoosh’ lines behind the cars.] Most of the people have to go to Earth to get the grass. Petrol stations, but they call them grass stations ... Well it’s up in space I suppose there is no gravity there.
C: [Adds a purple vertical line between the two cars and another between the ‘Gravity Machine’ and the ‘Fish’ spaceship.] Some of the stuff on the picture, like human stuff just flying around, had a crash. And got muddled up. ‘Cause it’s outside [orbit] … That’s [car on the right] purple in the inside. It used to be powered on grass but now it is powered on down because it’s so heavy … The cars are small but so heavy it’s not funny. Not even with no gravity.

A: That one’s going to crash, is it?

C: Yup, it is going down, down, down, down, down … That’s what happened there. They [tunnel guard rails] are supposed to be up like that [gestures] but they are down like that [gestures] … And here is the other car that made that one happen [to spiral out of orbit].

As the examples illustrate, the children were actively within the experience. Similarly, the reader becomes a participant in a sense, seeing and hearing the unfolding of events, almost as if sitting at the feet of a storyteller or, more accurately, a narrator-animator. It is as if being systematically placed inside the child’s ‘frame of experience’ (McLuhan & Fiore, 1967, p. 53).

Because of the fluidity of the child’s involvement, at times it is difficult to distinguish between what I call the child-as-subject and the child-as-spectator, or between the child-as-creator and the child-as-created. Indeed, the child’s very participation in the drawing-telling ‘plays a part in the constitution of the subject’ (Chandler, 2002, p. 91), similar to how one identifies with characters in a film or novel. As author-artist, the child simultaneously participates inside and outside the creative experience, which is reflected in the form of the accompanying narration.

**Narration and polyvocality**

Children’s forms of participation in drawing-telling often shift between two different subject positions:

- enacting the character and event from inside the experience (through first-person narration), as in ‘Reuban the Backhoe Digger’ or ‘Joel the Policeman’
- describing it from outside the experience (through third-person narration, such as in ‘Michael the Sci-Fi Storyboarder’).

This shifting between being depicted (embodifying or enacting the character) and being the depicter (impartially drawing-telling the event) is revealed within a single sentence in the following example of a girl’s (5.7) description of a policewoman capturing a criminal (italicised words are used for emphasis):

A gun, and I’m gonna … and she’s gonna grab the gun off him.

As reflected in this sentence, the artist was simultaneously enacting and ‘graphic-ing’ the role of policewoman (i.e. the drawing of the handcuff touching the ‘bad guy’s’ gun became the enactment of the event on paper, similar to dramatic play). Then, as if recognising the dilemma about being both depicter and depicted, she shifted from subject to spectator by moving from identifying with the policewoman role (I’m gonna) to telling the event as an impersonal third-person narration (She’s gonna).

As in this example, many children are conscious of how drawing-telling allows them to suspend disbelief—they accept the premise that their drawings-stories are works of fiction and are comfortable playing with this illusion. Hence, they can feel at liberty to alter the framework of their depictions and to change the characters and shift their identification with characters to suit their purpose. They can take on the roles of one or all of these characters, and alter these roles at will in relation to the evolving events of the drawing-telling (Wright, 2005, in press). (For further details of the context of the research related to children’s drawings ‘of what the future will be like’, presented in this paper, and the methodology used, refer to Wright [in press] and Wright [2005].)
dissimilar to that of polyvocality, where first-person commentary shifts from person to person within a text (Chandler, 2002, p. 189). Although there is only one person authoring the text, the child’s simultaneous depiction of and description of people, objects and events within the text allows the author to take on many roles and use multiple voices. In this sense, each of the characters in the drawing-telling assumes some element of the author’s fictional self, similar to how a child, during play, shifts-in-and-out of various roles (e.g. ‘I’ll be the mother … OK, now I’m the baby’).

Each character in the drawing-telling is enacted (spoken for), or alternatively narrated (spoken about), while moving between characters within the text. In all cases, however, there is some aspect of enactment which takes place, either close up and personal, as if being the character or, more impersonally, as if talking about the event. The simultaneous sense of child-as-creator and child-as-created evolves as the voices of each of the graphic figures becomes activated—each is created from paper, ink, body and narration—before our very eyes.

Hence, polyvocality offers multiple tellings and multiple readings of an event. The child’s act of drawing the figures gives each character a form, a type of being. In addition, the child’s accompanying comments such as, ‘I’m gonna do the dog’, ‘I’m gonna grab the gun’ or ‘this other car made that one happen’ give each character/object one or more movement-based roles within one or more events.

The child’s drawing-telling reveals relationships and patterns which all contribute to the generation of meaning. Hence, a central aspect of an adult’s ability to understand children’s meaning-making such as this is linked to their awareness of the agency of the narrator, and the fluidity of the relationships and patterns within the various voices made available through the medium.

The agency of the narrator

In drawing-telling, the child’s ‘voice’ may lie predominantly in the graphic domain rather than in the verbal. In such cases, the image is intended to speak for itself—the sign is expected to be obvious. For instance, the identity or role of a human figure may be assumed by the child to be ‘understood’, yet this may not be as apparent to an adult. The ambiguity of a sign is caused by the fact that the human figure (and other schema) has the potential to stand for either a generic or a specific character.

For instance, a child’s drawn ‘person’ may represent a universal category, such as ‘human’, but it can also specifically depict a particular person, such as ‘Mummy’ or ‘Me’ (Wright, 2003b). Similarly, a child’s schematic drawing of, say, a house, animal or car generally stands for a prototypical representation; but it can also stand for specific versions of these concepts (e.g. Granny’s house, my cat, Dad’s car). In addition, the function of the sign may change throughout a telling.

Hence, the understanding of meaning of a sign must be made with reference to the child’s purpose. For example, the person illustrated in the drawing below is based on a five-year-old girl’s schema for human; however, the variations of her more common prototype include extremely long hair, a long central line to represent the ‘core’ of the body, and billowing, wing-like shapes to represent the dress. These qualities assist in communicating the message that this is not an ‘ordinary’ person but, as the telling unfolds, a fairy.

Yet the adult interacting with the young girl did not pick up on these schematic differentiations and began questioning her as if the figure were meant to represent the artist herself: ‘is it you?’; ‘you’re a bride!’ The girl did not correct these assumptions, but instead non-verbally complied by nodding in agreement and, subsequently in her telling of the event, referred to the figure as ‘me’. However, graphically she continued to develop the content to suit her own purposes, which became a depiction of the fairy’s secret garden. A segment of the transcript below illustrates the subtle way in which the young girl asserts the agency of the figure.

A: Wow, that’s beautiful. Tell me about this person. Is it you when you grow up?

C: [Nods head yes—although doesn’t seem to be sure.]

A: Tell me about what is on there.

C: [Points to the circle.] This is my head. These are my two eyes and this is my mouth.

A: What is the pink?

C: Um, the dress.

A: It’s a beautiful dress. Where are you going in that beautiful dress?
C: A wedding.
A: Oh, you’re a bride! Are you going to get married in that beautiful dress?
C: [Nods.]
A: What’s this bit? [Points to the tall, narrow triangular shape on the right-hand side of the page.]
C: The house, and that’s [pointing to the trees] the secret garden … That’s grass [below the trees] … At the bottom [of the garden] is rocks and, um, they’re the trees, like we have on the secret garden. That’s the house.
A: And why is it a secret?
C: Umm, because it’s a fairy house.
A: What’s it going to be like inside this house?
C: Umm, beautiful things.

Although the girl asserted that the figure was a fairy (not herself), there were many aspects of the drawing-telling where the graphic content (e.g. the fairy house and secret garden) was intended to ‘speak for itself’. It was as if the preschool girl assumed the adult could imagine for herself the details of the garden and what it would be like inside the house—further elaboration seemed redundant. The assumption was that the adult should be able to suspend disbelief along with the child.

The girl’s economic use of language implied open-endedness, and an opportunity for multiple meanings. For instance, her response to the question ‘what is it going to be like inside this house’ (i.e. ‘beautiful things’) could be taken to mean there would be beautiful objects/resources, such as nice furniture, good food, beautiful paintings on the walls and peaceful music. Alternatively, it could be interpreted to mean that beautiful events would occur there. The open-ended, fluid nature of the child’s drawing-telling contained the play-like qualities of imagination, where anything is possible, anything can be. Hence the content and form of her meaning was open to multiple roles, multiple tellings, multiple interpretations and multiple functions.

Multiple functions: Objects and events

Similar to how the agency of the narrator is affected by the child’s various subject positionings, the events within a drawing-telling can also shift, and objects and characters that originally functioned in one way may be altered to function in another way later. For instance, at the beginning of one drawing, David (5.9) describes himself as getting some bags out of the boot of his car after coming home from shopping.

Later in the telling, after explaining that ‘he’ will work as a driver-trainer (in the future) and have his own company car with a Driver Training sign on the top, he changed the function of the car boot from containing groceries to containing a battery (which he needed to turn on to light up the sign after dark).

I’m just getting the spare battery out of the boot. [Draws headlights, taillights and a lit (pink radiating) sign on top of the car.] And ah, the cardboard [sign] has a light on it so you can see it at dark night too.

Such examples of multiple functions of characters and events are made clear through an awareness of the relationships between form and content and structuralist principles of children’s expression. Many of these principals have parallel qualities to the text of film.

Filmic textual features

A viewer of film is able to read its images in a similar way to a photograph. Reading photographs involves relating to the signifying functions of characters’ postures, expressions and gestures; the associations evoked by depicted objects and settings; sequences of photographs … and relationships with accompanying text’ (Barthes, 1977, pp. 21-25).

However, in reading children’s drawings-tellings there are additional factors that must be considered, particularly if one is concerned with not only the end product but also the processes of their works-in-the-making. Hence, children’s fluidly evolving meaning-making during drawing-telling contains qualities that have figurative equivalencies to filmic textual features, such as the:

- creation of topics, subject-matter, basic themes and the depiction of values
- enactment of characters (e.g. roles, personal qualities, behaviours and goals)
- narration of the plot, structure and events
- formation of objects, scenery, the setting (e.g. history, geography) and decor.

All of these aspects allow the young authors to bring their works to life, similar to how a film director works with various elements to create a final product. In some
ways, observing a child drawing-telling is similar to watching a documentary of the making of a film, being there with the characters on the film set, and observing the techniques of capturing the acting and the action as it occurs. Although the child is not using a camera to shoot the content of the drawing, similar aesthetic decisions are being made in the selection or execution of the graphic content in relation to matters such as:

- light, colour, ‘close-ups’ (size differentiations and foci) and editing (altering the verbal and/or graphic content during the drawing-telling through techniques such as cutting and fading)
- sequencing (visual and verbal)
- sound (telling, expressive vocalisation and onomatopoeia)
- action (gesture, graphic devices such as ‘whoosh’ lines and repeated images)
- ‘time (compression, flashbacks, flash-forwards, slow motions)’ (Tagg, 1988, pp. 63-64)
- space (visual composition, gestural connections).

With regard to time and space, there are elements of children’s drawings-tellings that incorporate the film/television concepts of ‘frame’, ‘shot’ (a single take) and ‘scene’ (a sequence of frames which may consist of more than one place and/or time) (Hodge & Tripp, 1986). Many of these filmic features were illustrated in ‘Joel the Policeman’, described earlier (see image 6). Joel’s (6.4) depiction was of two events (filmic scenes) occurring simultaneously in two different parts of the world. He used many techniques to shift between these two scenes, and to bring one side of the world ‘alive’ while the other side was ‘sleeping’.

On the left-hand side (see detail of full work below), in the rectangle taking up the top-third of the page, Joel depicts two athletes (one red Canadian, one green Australian) running around a yellow track, and red jagged lines arching above the track. A segment of the conversation reveals that the jagged lines, and the triangular-shaped objects flying out from them, represent a bomb explosion at an Olympic event:

**Image 14.**

A: What have you drawn there?
C: Well, this is it here: the Olympics. And that’s where the bomb came [red jagged lines] … and that’s all the metal things that came up [green shapes above].
A: Mm-hmm. So the red is all where the bomb went off.
C: Yeah.

Joel demonstrated flexibility of thought as he grappled with how to simultaneously illustrate, on one page, two separate events occurring on opposite sides of the world. The difficulty he faced was associated with the fact that he wanted each of the two events to occur during the daytime, but cognitively he knew that when it was daytime on one side of the world, it would be night on the other.

His dual depiction of events actually began on the right-hand side of the page, which is a complicated police-station scene (discussed in more detail later in this segment). Then, he shifted his attention to the left-hand-side theme, the bomb explosion at the Olympics.

He began this scene by drawing a yellow sun in the top-left-hand corner of the page, which included small orange dots between its rays and facial features inside the sun itself. (This particular sun is not visible [i.e. it has been blocked out] for reasons illustrated in the following excerpt—the sun which is visible actually is a third sun that was added later.)

A: Well, that was an interesting way to do the sun.
C: Mmm. Woopsies! I’ve done the sun at the wrong side.
A: Did you? Where did you want to do it?
C: Over here [points to the right-hand side of the page].
A: Over there? Oh, why’s that?
C: Because that’s the other side of the world, and that’s this side [Australia].
A: Oh. Right. Well, there’s no taking it off now.
C: Who cares? I’ll just draw over it. [Draws a line to divide the Olympics from the Police Place, about a third of the way in from the left-hand side of the page.]
A: So what is the black line for? To show you …
C: To show you which one’s dark and which one’s light.
A: Oh, so one time—place—is daytime, and one’s the night-time, is it?
C: Yeah.

After adding details to the police-station scene, which includes a second sun in the top-right-hand corner (see below), Joel then re-clarifies the daytime/night-time juxtaposition of the two scenes.
He finishes the rectangle to ‘frame’ the Olympic event on the left-hand side, and then fills out the left border of the rectangular frame with thicker, black colouring-in lines which cover most of the sun. This line extends across the top of the page to connect with the sun on the right-hand side of the page. In so doing, Joel ‘fades out’ the left-hand scene and ‘fades in’ the right-hand scene. Having resolved this dilemma, Joel returns to the Olympic scene and turns it back into daytime by drawing a third sun, ‘rising’ on the other side of the world.

Joel’s ingenious shifting from daytime to night-time and back to daytime again illustrates that he was able to overcome the restrictions of a single scene within his drawing. By including two scenes, he could portray parallel events within one drawing. His recreation of time–space relations allowed for other simultaneous, parallel components which also utilised filmic techniques. For instance, on the right-hand side of the page Joel draws and describes a police station with a police dog in training. He illustrates the same dog in several different locations, similar to showing a sequence of film frames. He draws a black slide with a brown dog at the base, then a second brown dog at the top of the ladder, and a third brown dog sliding down the slide (the fourth dog seen in this segment is added later in a new scene).

C: [Points to the figures on the track.] And now it’s sun ... The sun is shining up here where all the medals are. And it’s dark over here at night time. [Squeezes the third sun in between the black scribble-out lines and the metal from the explosion.]

A: So when it’s daytime at the Olympics, it’s night-time at the jail, is it?

C: Yep.

C: [Points to the figures on the track.] And now it’s sun ... The sun is shining up here where all the medals are. And it’s dark over here at night time. [Squeezes the third sun in between the black scribble-out lines and the metal from the explosion.]

A: And they’re training to ... what, run up the ladder, are they?

C: Yeah, and go ... and run down it.

A: Pretty clever, aren’t they, to climb up ladders like that? … OK, and are there three dogs there, or is it the same dog?

C: Well, that’s when it’s going up [points] and that’s when it’s up the top [points] and that’s when it’s going down [points].

A: OK, so there’s only really one dog here. It’s just in different positions. OK.
To the left of the dog-training slide, Joel draws a blue rectangular police car with red and blue lights on the top. Right of the slide he draws a tall, purple watchtower with a purple policeman standing guard. Then he draws three yellow house-shaped jails, located at the top of the page, above the slide. He adds black vertical bars on the jail, and brown stick figures in the two larger jails.

Once again, Joel repeats images to illustrate a string of events—a policeman and a police dog capturing and jailing a ‘bad person’. Joel gives the dog a second role and unfolds another sequence of events—within an integrated plot (Wilson & Wilson, 1977).

A: So who do you keep in there [the jail]?
C: All the bad people. [Draws a green person to the right of the slide, in front of the jail.]
A: Oh, right. Who’s that person?
C: Oh, this [scene] is where all the guard dogs are going after the person. [Draws another brown dog, left of the dog in the top position on the slide.]
A: Oh, is he sort of running away, is he?
C: Yeah. Because he’s the one that’s escaping [points to the green stick figure near the slide]. But here [in this part of the scene] they caught him and put him in jail. [Draws another green stick figure in a third, small jail to show that he is now captured and back in jail.]

Finally, Joel illustrates another before-and-after event by repeating images to represent shifts in time and space. When asked what he will do in the future, he describes moving to a different house, and shows his before-and-after houses in two locations.

First he draws a black stylised house in the bottom-right-hand corner of the page, with a stick figure standing beside it. ‘This [scene] is when I’m leaving home.’ Then he adds a thin house, squeezed in between the police car and the frame of the Olympic event (where he will live in the future). ‘And here’s [points to bottom right-hand corner] where I am ... where I’m living now.’

To summarise the key components of his graphic-narration, Joel was invited to give his work a title.

C: Um … This is the bomb explosion and this is the police place.
A: The police place? So it’s ‘The bomb explosion’ …
C: Yep. Up behind the police …
A: And …
C: ‘The police place’.

Ironically, when asked if there was a story that goes with the drawing, Joel presented a truncated, purely verbal version, which bore very little resemblance to the richness of images, objects, events and dual-depiction of world affairs that were drawn, told and enacted during his 30-minute ‘graphic-narrative play’ (Wright, 2005, in press). Joel essentially ‘fast forwarded’ to the very last episode, skipping everything else that had led up to this. He simply reiterated this final segment, as if to comply with the adult requirement of providing a synopsis of his present-and-future event: ‘This is when I’m an adult, and I’m leaving home. And this is where I’m a … when I’m bigger.’

This truncated version of a story is the type of rendition that adults often hear when they ask children to tell them about their artworks after the event. Such ‘stories’ are not representative of the full drawing event, and often do little justice to the depth of children’s thinking and feeling that may have occurred. Unless we witness the full event, our versions of children’s drawing-telling experiences are devoid of all the enacted details and, consequently, can remain at a relatively superficial level—stagnant, truncated and often emotionless.
Yet, if we enter into the child’s drawing-telling, we come to realise the ‘co-emergence’ of content, substance, form and expression, and how their work is a composition in progress. It is an unfolding meaning-making experience that builds layer upon layer of perceptions, thoughts and feelings, which generally cannot be summarised adequately after the event.

This is because the text of children’s drawings-tellings often involves ‘graphic-ing’ and ‘telling’ the characters, themes/plots/events, objects/scenery/settings, methods (e.g. fade-ins and fade-outs, frames of movement) and integrated events. Hence, filmic analysis can be a key feature for understanding children’s creation, communication and interpretation of meaning through drawing-telling.

**Summary**

The essence of young children’s meaning-making is a synthesis of thought, body and emotion (Wright, 2003a, 2003b). Their rich and integrated creations include many signs—words, graphic devices, onomatopoeia, writing, gestures/postures—which stand for or represent other things. Children’s meaning-making shifts fluidly between intratextual components such as graphic images (e.g. objects, characters), labelling, ‘whoosh’ lines, captions and other techniques that help anchor the text.

Such relationships all contribute to the generation of meaning through dynamic enactment, which is similar to roleplay on paper (Wright, 2005, in press). Consequently, at times there can be unclear boundaries between child-as-subject and child-as-spectator, and between child-as-creator and child-as-created.

This blurring of boundaries is often reflected in the vibrant and evolving nature of the agency of children’s narration. Fluidity in children’s expression is reflected in their polyvocality and in the multiple functions they give to characters, objects and events. Hence, to understand children’s meaning, interpretation must involve an awareness of the sequential and structural relationships within aspects of their works, which often are analogous to filmic features.

**References**


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Children of refugee families as artists
Bridging the past, present and future

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IN THIS PAPER WE examine the place of art in curriculum for young children of refugee families, but not from the relatively common art-as-therapy position. Instead, art is presented as a language that can provide young children with the means to engage with learning, build identity and tell their stories. This approach bypasses the deficit position children may be placed in because of their differences, which include language, culture and social capital. This is an account of an arts experience conducted by an artist who worked with a group of young children of refugee families, and some preliminary analysis of what we learned through the project.

Introduction

MORE THAN HALF OF the world’s estimated 19 million refugees are children (UNHCR, 2007). Australia’s humanitarian immigration program allows for 13,000 new places each year, of which around one in three are for children (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2006). As the rate of immigration grows, debates on cultural diversity in schools and in society are increasing. Issues of multiculturalism and cultural diversity are hot topics. Australian classrooms are increasingly composed of refugees and asylum-seekers who have, by definition, arrived from a range of culturally diverse countries, and have experienced persecution (or fear of persecution). The issue of illegal immigrants, refugees and children in detention has caused considerable political debate in Australia. But, as Emery (2005) points out, there has been less interest in what happens to these children and their families once they are accepted as immigrants.

The resettlement process has been defined as a ‘secondary trauma’ for children and their families as they face challenges such as entering the education system and job market, finding accommodation and learning a new language. The past, present and future are inextricably linked, as refugee families struggle to maintain hope for the future while dealing with traumatic past experiences and facing the daily challenges of a new and unfamiliar society (Brough, Gorman, Ramirez & Westoby, 2003).

The resettlement period is of particular importance for young children. For countries with high rates of immigration, early childhood education and care programs are key sites for enacting national goals for social inclusion and the creation of new citizens. The early years are critical to the development, and future, of children of refugee families. For parents who have recently immigrated to a new country, enrolling their child in an early childhood program is one moment where cultural values of their home and adopted culture come into contact and, often, conflict. More difficult to heal than the diseases and malnutrition they may bring with them from impoverished homelands are the psychological and social wounds resulting from the trauma of war and displacement (Brunick, 1999).

Various studies have focused on refugee students, and their behaviours have been described as ranging from alienated, violent and angry to under-performing, vulnerable and paranoid (Kabir & Richards, 2006). In educational settings these kinds of behaviours are viewed by some as maladaptive and undesirable. Yet quality early childhood programs have been shown to make a difference to children, promoting resilience.
and minimising the risk of developing mental health problems, most notably post-traumatic stress disorders (Brough et al., 2003; Jackson, 2006). The role of early childhood professionals is critical then, as they provide support, hope and a safe environment that encourages healing during the resettlement period.

In this paper we examine the place of art in the curriculum for young children of refugee families, but not from the strictly art-as-therapy position. Art is a language that can provide young children with the means to engage, build identity, and tell their stories, bypassing the deficit position they may be placed in because of differences, which can include language, culture and social capital. Increasing evidence suggests that building social capital contributes to a range of positive health, education and social outcomes (Tayler, Farrell, Tennent & Patterson, 2005). We provide here an account of an arts experience conducted by an artist who worked with a group of young children of refugee families, and some preliminary analysis of what we learned through the project.

Contrary to some popular views of the purpose and product of such children’s engagement with the arts, the children did not depict traumatic scenes of war, killing and anxiety. Instead, they welcomed the opportunity to engage with the processes of art-making, and, through our observations of both their processes and final products, we saw them communicating with each other and us. We could see them working at constructing identities. We learned something about their interests, and their connectedness, in the present. This is not to negate the worth and value of art therapy, but rather to celebrate other functions of art—as language, as a communication tool, and as a means to construct and build identity and social capital. We conclude this paper not with answers and ‘recipes for success’ but with some new questions for teachers and other community members who share our interests in ways of supporting some of our most vulnerable children.

The workshops

In November 2006 the teachers at a Queensland state government primary school engaged a practising artist to conduct a series of three visual art workshops at their school. The teachers at this school have a commitment to the benefits of an arts-rich program, and value the artist-in-schools model. This involves a shared conversation between the artist and the teachers about the children, their needs, and the place of the arts in supporting the children’s ongoing development. The artist was commissioned to run three one-hour workshops with nine children from a Year Two class. The children were (approximately) eight years old. (A lack of documentation, plus language and cultural barriers, means the school is unable to verify the age of children.) They originated from a range of countries including Afghanistan, Liberia and Sudan. The children had been in Australia for varying amounts of time—some had arrived at school only weeks earlier. Some children had minimal English language skills, and most reported having had little previous experience with the arts. The workshops were documented using digital photography (video and still) and field notes.

The children were withdrawn from their regular classes for one hour per week, over a period of three weeks. Peg (pseudonym), the artist, guided the children through the process of creating a mixed media portrait. In the first week she showed them examples of artists’ works, particularly self-portraits. For example, they looked together at some works by Frida Kahlo, Picasso and others, particularly works which might make some connections with the children’s possible aesthetic and cultural origins. Peg talked with the children about the artworks, pointing out features such as objects, colours and details in the work. The children were then set the task of drawing a portrait, on paper at first, and then transferring it to a large canvas. Peg worked with children individually at this stage, helping them to see lines and shapes, and gently guided them to make their drawings large, encouraging them to use the entire canvas.

The next week, Peg provided the children with a range of recycled materials and demonstrated how they could build their drawings by overlaying them with 3D materials. She began by demonstrating to the whole group and then moved around the group, working with children one on one, offering assistance when she could. When they had built their images to their satisfaction, Peg showed the children how to paint their surfaces with gesso (paint primer), in preparation for the final week, when they would add colour. In the third and final week, the prepared surfaces had dried, and the children painted over, choosing colours and re-painting until they were satisfied. Peg helped with choice of colours, talking about contrasts (e.g. light/dark), patterns and so on. In the end, some children created self-portraits, although most painted portraits of other people.

Peg’s purpose was to provide the children with exposure to, and experience in, the arts as well as an avenue for creative expression. She introduced them to the language of art, to the appreciation of artists’ works, to some skills and techniques, and to a range of artistic processes. The children participated with energy and enthusiasm, and we saw many instances of persistence, sharing, connecting with others, and joyful engagement. They delighted in the opportunities to make their works unique, adding individual details which produced, in the end, nine portraits that were dramatically different, bright, colourful and dynamic. The children and their teachers were pleased and proud of
the end products, and, through the process, we learned something about each child.

Despite their limited English proficiencies, the children frequently made comments throughout the workshops which revealed to us that they had both hope for the future and insights into their present circumstances:

Shilo: This is a photo of Jack Bishop—he’s a boy in my class.

Jess: It’s a picture of Miss Barker [pseudonym]. I put stars to make in her eyes to make it beautiful because she is so beautiful.

Milly: I wish next week we would still come to art class, forever, until I go to high school.

Jackson: If I grow up I want to be an artist

Peg (artist): You want to be an artist; well, you know what you have to do? You have to do lots of drawings and lots of painting. Practising. It’s just like an instrument. You have to practice ... I think you should say you are artists now; you don’t have to say ‘when I grow up’.

What’s art got to do with it?

During times of great stress, the arts can provide a buffer between us and reality, and an outlet for emotional expression—sometimes a means of expressing that for which we may not have words. There are a growing number of instances where children of refugee families have been encouraged to use art-making as a means of expression—as a bridge between their war-torn past, and their present survival and future hopes. After September 11, for instance, children’s drawings were generated, examined and exhibited as a device for processing the associated trauma (Orr, 2002). Similarly, exhibitions of artworks produced by children in wartorn Afghanistan (Ali, 2007) provoke response and empathy from those who have viewed the works. Recently, an exhibition of children’s art was curated, depicting their responses following the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami (Ware & Potter, 2005).

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that many children in refugee camps find it difficult to express in words how they feel, often withdrawing into themselves. In camps where children have been given art materials and basic art lessons, these children have found it less disturbing to relive their memories through painting, using artwork as a means of expression (UNHCR, 2007). Once the children are repatriated, school is a natural setting for them to receive intervention, with art as an effective way for them to record, and grapple with, their experiences (Brunick, 1999, p. 12). However, we would caution against reading too much of a therapeutic nature into the content of children’s art, with a reminder that exhibitions are compilations and constructed by the curator.

In our workshops, the children did not depict war, trauma, or other similar disturbing content. Instead, they seemed more engrossed in the materials and processes, and we were able to make connections with them through sharing the art-making.

What is the role for the teacher?

Ambivalence in arts pedagogy has become institutionalised. It is not surprising that many teachers avoid intervention when it comes to art education. The laissez-faire approach relies on children’s ‘natural’ development, and purportedly protects their individuality, creativity, self-expression and self-esteem. Critiques of this approach point to the obvious lack of artistic development in the majority of adults, who, left to their own devices, have not developed into accomplished artists (McArde & McWilliam, 2005). But the laissez-faire approach retains its attraction for many teachers in Australia, possibly because it fits well with their level of arts knowledge, experience and skills. A more guided approach to learning in the arts calls for the direct teaching of skills and techniques, scaffolding, modeling, demonstrating, and teacher and children working together as co-artists, co-constructors (Wright, 2003).

The guided learning approach requires of the teacher a level of discipline, knowledge and expertise. One way of addressing teachers’ lack of confidence in the arts is to invite artists into the school community, and to work alongside the classroom teachers. In our project, Peg introduced the children to art history and appreciation, taught skills and techniques, modeled and demonstrated, and worked alongside the children as co-artist.

Art and diversity

The issue of immigration is closely tied to the issue of diversity. However, according to Emery (2005), the majority of teachers are unprepared for dealing with cultural diversity in an art classroom. When students are from non-English-speaking backgrounds, bring their own social and cultural experiences to the classroom and have suffered severe trauma, the complexities of arts pedagogy are magnified. This raises additional questions, such as those expressed by one teacher (Szente, Hoot & Taylor, 2006):

Since children are not able to communicate in English and I am not able to speak their native languages, we utilize a lot of playful, hands-on activities. These activities utilize the universal languages such as art and music, and enable children to start sharing their experiences. The activities also enable us to provide children with strategies for coping with their experiences. (p. 17)

We conclude our paper with a list of questions which this project raised for us, and which have prompted our ongoing reflections on art, teaching and diversity issues:
How do children experience art when they have had little previous contact with the arts in their home country?

How can arts programs contribute to building connections between the child’s worlds of family and school?

Can parents recognise that children can build capacities through producing artworks, without language barriers, which may assist them with language acquisition and other academic achievements?

Although current thinking in early childhood pedagogy calls for engaging with children’s backgrounds and interests, will children seek to withdraw emotionally, or exhibit behaviours which indicate trauma? For instance, Emery (2005) describes a child who: ‘... was sick to death of it [war] and didn’t want to talk about it. When the Iraq war was on the art teacher talked to him about it and he just said, ‘I don’t want anything to do with it. They are all mad.’” (p. 3)

This project advocated for children creating self-portraits. But are teachers aware that some cultural and religious factors, such as depicting the human figure, may be inappropriate to some groups?

Should educators in a multicultural early childhood classroom encourage socially, politically and economically disadvantaged groups to undertake ‘cultural projection’; i.e. to create new and more positive images of themselves for the purposes of increasing cultural and social capital?

References


Conclusion

Having proposed this list of questions which have emerged from our reflections on the project, we note that many of the issues raised are relevant to any early childhood arts classroom. Many teachers grapple with the conflicting imperatives of the curriculum, parental expectations, the place of the arts in our communities, and the need for addressing diversity. Exemplary art teachers accommodate natural unfolding and guided learning, creativity and technical training (McArdle, 2001; Wright, 1991). These teachers work to ensure they are sensitive to the needs of individuals, respect differences and allow students to engage in art that has real meaning for them. As demonstrated by Peg, the artist in our project, good arts pedagogy calls for the design of arts activities which allow for multiple entry points (Gardner, 1989), enabling children to express themselves freely, accessing assistance in developing artistry, and building capacities.

Children have much to say, and certainly children who have survived a war have a special need to find an expressive outlet for their disturbing past experiences, their difficult present and their hopes for the future. Art as language is a way of knowing that can be experienced with the mind, heart, body and ‘soul’ (Wright, 2003). It is a powerful language that children of refugee families can access, with the support of their teacher, as they create bridges between traumatic pasts, their present survival and their future hopes.
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