Pathways to the Graphicacy Club: the Crossroad of Home and Pre-School
Angela Anning

*Journal of Early Childhood Literacy* 2003 3: 5
DOI: 10.1177/14687984030031001

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://ecl.sagepub.com/content/3/1/5

Published by:
http://www.sagepublications.com

Additional services and information for *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy* can be found at:

- **Email Alerts:** [http://ecl.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts](http://ecl.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts)
- **Subscriptions:** [http://ecl.sagepub.com/subscriptions](http://ecl.sagepub.com/subscriptions)
- **Reprints:** [http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav](http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav)
- **Permissions:** [http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav](http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav)
- **Citations:** [http://ecl.sagepub.com/content/3/1/5.refs.html](http://ecl.sagepub.com/content/3/1/5.refs.html)

>> **Version of Record - Apr 1, 2003**

What is This?
Pathways to the Graphicacy Club: The crossroad of home and pre-school

ANGELA ANNING
University of Leeds, UK

Abstract The article challenges the narrow versions of literacy in current versions of early childhood education in the UK. The theoretical underpinning for the paper is drawn from sociocultural perspectives and what Kress (1997) defines as the ‘broad and messy area . . . of communication and representation’. It is argued that we need to broaden our understanding of literacy to include young children’s representations in graphic and narrative versions, influenced by the media and ‘everyday’ exchanges with siblings and significant adults, that characterize their journeys towards literacy in home settings. When they enter pre-school and start school the versions of representations they are encouraged to do are driven by a narrow emphasis on school versions of literacy and numeracy. The kind of personal and social drawings done at home are discarded. The argument is illustrated by examples of young children drawing in home and school settings taken from a three-year longitudinal study of seven young children’s meaning making as they moved from home to pre-school and the beginning of schooling.

Keywords drawing; versions of literacy; young children

Versions of literacies and graphicacy

The starting point for this article is that the status of visual aspects of literacy and graphical forms of representation are under-valued, under-researched and under-represented in the domain of early childhood education. Our construct of the development of literacy is grounded in the emergence of literate behaviours in young children traditionally associated with the narrow versions of literacies confined to aspects of learning to decode and encode print. Kress contrasts this construct of literacy as ‘lettered representation’ with broader aspects of communication (Bearne and Kress, 2001). Lanksheer et al. (1997) argue powerfully that the dominance of particular,
‘high status’ versions of language use, such as those associated with learning to ‘read’ and ‘write’ in conventional terms, are maintained by structural systems within education and work. Versions related to ‘popular culture’ and ‘media imagery’ are marginalized by the culture of schooling, particularly those represented in visual imagery (Marsh and Millard, 2000).

Yet the evidence is all around us of the rapidly changing nature of communication systems in the ‘real world’ beyond schools. For example, Kress (1997) argues that communication systems, such as television, videos, computer games, and the Internet, are increasingly characterized by ‘multi-modality’ and ‘multi-literacy’. Much of children’s spontaneous, play-based behaviours and related graphical representations before school reflect the multi-modality of the communication systems to which Kress refers. He argues that schools should build on young children’s flexible approaches to combining speech, action, drawing and sound in their activities:

It is essential that . . . children are encouraged . . . in their fundamental disposition towards multi-modal forms of text and meaning making . . . Above all there will need to be particular emphasis on developing their awareness about the dynamic interaction between the various modes, and their awareness that all modes are constantly changing in their interaction with other modes; and through the sign-maker’s use. (Kress, 1997: 154)

My focus in this article will be on how young children absorb visual information and gain an understanding of graphical representations in their journeys towards the ‘literacies’ that are used in the communities in which they are growing up and how those understandings are re-represented in their meaning making through the medium of mark-making and drawings. I will argue that practitioners in early years settings should pay as much attention to how young children make their way into The Graphicacy Club as we do to their progress towards The Literacy Club (Smith, 1978). We should resist the temptation to be drawn into the preparation of young children for narrow school versions of literacy; but rather build on the richness of children’s home versions of graphicacy and narrative.

A limitation of the theoretical frameworks for understanding the links between emergent literacy and graphicacy has been that scholarship and research have developed within the distinct curriculum fields of English and Art and Design and the distinct disciplines of psychology (in particular developmental psychology) and social semiotics. Only the brave, such as Kress, have attempted to make links between the domains. Before attempting to address these links, research in the distinct domains of young
children’s drawing, meaning making and the significance of the socio-cultural context on their representation and communication will be reviewed.

Research into young children’s drawing development

Research into children’s drawing in the UK and USA, as with much research into early childhood education, has been dominated by the discipline of developmental psychology. For example Kellogg (1969) and Lowenfeld and Brittain (1987) collected drawings from large cohorts of children in order to identify developmental stages in children’s drawing. Milbraith (1998) drew on cognitive psychology to explore the perceptual processes, concept formation, memory and sensori-motor competencies of gifted children drawing. There have been some detailed, longitudinal case studies in naturalistic settings, often by parents, of individual children’s drawing development (Lucquet, 1913, 1927; Matthews, 1999). Laboratory-based research by Cox (1991, 1992) and Willats (1977) focused on how different ages of children coped with the technical challenges of representing perspective, spatial orientation and occlusion. A further branch of psychology has used drawing as windows into children’s psychological states, particularly in relation to art as therapy or to gain insights into clinical, developmental or emotional deviations from so-called normal conditions (O’Connor and Hermelin, 1992; Malchiodi, 1998; Paine 1992).

There have been some small-scale research studies into children’s drawings in cross-cultural contexts (Wilson and Ligtvoet, 1992; Winner 1989). Only recently has there been research into children drawing in the contexts of pre-school or the early stages of school settings. Pahl (1999) studied children’s meaning making in a nursery setting. Athey (1990) focused on schema (including graphic versions) produced by young children both in a nursery and recorded by their parents at home over a period of time. Cooke et al. (1998) reported on an intervention programme, which involved ‘negotiated drawing’ lessons in Key Stage One classrooms.

Meaning making through mark-making and drawing

We have tried to get away from the notion of pre-reading and pre-writing to value children’s early literacy behaviour in its own right and in a more holistic way (Goodman, 1986). Interest has grown in the concept of ‘meaning making’ at home and in pre-school and school settings within the field of early language and literacy acquisition. Wells’s (1986) work was
seminal in the field. The argument is that from birth, children are learning
to be literate by responding to models of speech, reading and writing that
surround them in the communities in which they are growing up. Young
children learn through everyday interactions with their siblings, peers, or
significant adults around artefacts like the television screen, magazines,
catalogues and street and shop signs. They absorb the significance and
usefulness of symbolic forms by engaging in meaningful 'joint involvement
episodes' (Schaffer, 1992) which include responding to and representing
the signs and symbols within their communities. Within home settings
adults and children model functional graphical behaviours – drawing back
of envelope sketches for Do-It-Yourself activities, decoding diagrams or
illustrations from recipes books or motorbike manuals, drawing stick
figures to describe significant moves in football matches, poring over maps
to plan holiday routes or walks, studying photographs in catalogues to
choose clothes, decoding logos or photographs to select cereals in the
supermarket. It is the very ‘everydayness’ of it all that is significant (Anning
and Edwards, 1999).

While absorbing the semiotics of signs, symbols, prints, numbers, illus-
trations and diagrams around them, children continue personal journeys in
their mark making. Kress's (1997) detailed observations at home of his
young children’s journeys towards literacy include descriptions of their
dramatic play with household objects, playing out stories with small toys,
making collages, drawing and cutting out as well as beginning to write and
show interest in print. His insightful analysis of the evidence encourages us
to marvel at the flexibility of children’s meaning making and their unself-
conscious ability to flick from one mode of representation to another.

Dyson (1993) argues that symbol making is the essence of being human
and that drawing as a symbolic system is an important vehicle for humans
to liberate themselves from the here and now. She argues that drawing and
writing should be valued equally in young children’s meaning making and
that drawing should not simply be seen as leading to writing. She also
argues that both drawing and writing are vehicles for both personal reflec-
tion and communication with others (Dyson, 1994).

The sociocultural context of communication and
representation

In the last two decades there has been growing interest in the effects of the
sociocultural contexts in which children learn. One of the key features of
the paradigm is that children learn what is important within the cultures
of the communities in which they operate through interactions with more
experienced members of those cultures or communities. The more experienced members of the community may be children or adults.

An important tool for shaping the passing on of knowledge within a community is the language they use. But learning also occurs through interaction with objects (Anning and Edwards, 1999). Objects may be used in very different ways in different communities. For example a book may be used at home as a source of comfort and reassurance as part of a bedtime ritual and in school in the context of direct instruction about beginnings, middles and ends of narratives. Pencils and paper are used in different ways in an informal exchange between two siblings at home and in a pre-school context where the child may be set worksheet-based tasks by an adult to learn pencil control. There is both psychological and physical space between the child and adult in such interactions around objects. Both participants have to learn strategies to tune into each other (Trevarthen, 1993).

Another important feature of the sociocultural–psychological paradigm is the significance of the context for the kind of learning strategies a child adopts. Children learn to do what they think is expected of them by members of a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Chaiklin and Lave, 1993) in the context in which they act and behave as learners. For example, at home a child expects to be the person who asks questions of adults. One of the early lessons as they enter school settings is that here the expectation is quite the reverse. When you are learning to be a pupil it is the adults who ask questions of children (Willes, 1983). Such shifts in expectations of ‘appropriate’ learning behaviours impact on children’s developing sense of self – who they are and how they are expected to behave in relation to others – and on what children feel they can do.

The 10-year ethnographic study of language practices in three contrasting sociocultural contexts in the USA by Heath (1983) has been influential. She reported how the three communities socialized young children into particular patterns of language use. Her argument is that meaning making strategies are learned behaviours situated within particular temporal and cultural contexts. She investigated the processes by which the three groups of children in the late 1970s in three neighbourhoods in the USA were more or less prepared for the conventions of language they met as they started school.

But there have been no funded parallel studies of children acquiring the conventions of graphicacy. Graphicacy is associated with Art and Design. It is difficult to convince a research community dominated by developmental psychologists and proponents of research into the ‘status subjects’ of English, Science and Mathematics to invest in research into a ‘subject’ which
is perceived to be ‘marginal’ to educational attainments related to the standards agenda which has dominated the ethos of schools in the UK during the past decade. However, my argument is that decoding graphic information and encoding them through drawing, like acquiring skills in reading and writing, underpin capabilities across all areas of the curriculum.

**Young children drawing at home and school: a small-scale longitudinal study**

The article will draw on evidence from a longitudinal study over a three-year period of seven three- to six-year-old children meaning making in home and early childhood care and education settings. Kathy Ring collected the data in a funded project and for a doctorate, both supervised by the author. The research parallels detailed, ethnographic studies of home- and school-based literacy practices such as the work of Kenner (1994) and Gregory (1996) on bilingualism.

At the start of the three-year project the children were aged three to four. Two of them (a boy and a girl) attended a day-care setting (called a Family Centre) in an inner city area characterized by high levels of poverty, unemployment and poor quality council housing. Two (a boy and a girl) attended the Reception class in a newly built school in a mixed private and council house area in the inner suburbs of large city. The community was made up of mainly young families. Parents tended to be in skilled work or service industries. Three of the children (two boys and one girl) attended the nursery class of a long-established primary school in a ‘commuter belt’ village where the population consisted of established local families and ‘professionals’ as in-comers who were buying up and converting older properties or moving into newly built private housing estates.

The two headteachers and manager of the settings were contacted for permission for their staff and parents to work with us through local networks built up through research and vocational training initiatives. Staff in each pre-school setting who were willing to work with us were requested to nominate a girl and a boy child whose families were willing to cooperate with us over the three year period. The parents were approached for permission. In each year of the study the seven sets of parents and the key worker for the children were visited at home or in the pre-school/school settings and briefed on the purposes and procedures of the project. All the families stayed with us for the three years of the project. This was due to Kathy’s skills in keeping them informed and interested in the data as the cases built up. Predictably as the children moved through the schooling system we found some professionals less enthusiastic about
taking part in the research; but they all did cooperate in data collection and follow-up discussions.

We selected the transitional period of entry to a new educational setting for the annual data collection as this period was likely to highlight the similarities and differences of the learning context as the child bedded into new routines and rituals. The parents and practitioners were interviewed at the start of each new school year using a semi-structured interview to probe their beliefs about the value of drawing and modelling activities for children’s learning and in particular their perspectives on the learning behaviours of the case-study children. Field notes were kept about contextual features of the settings. The parents and practitioners were given an instant camera and large scrap book and asked to collect evidence of the children’s 3D representational play and 2D communications over a period of a month from both home and school contexts. They were asked to add notes about the purpose, time and context of the children’s activities.

At the end of the month the parents and practitioners were revisited. The photographic and visual evidence of the children’s activities was used as the stimulus for a dialogue between the researcher and adults. Key workers from the first year of the project were invited to a day workshop to help us to identify key issues arising from our first attempts to analyse the data. All interviews and the workshop discussions were tape recorded and transcribed. Each year the parents were presented with full size, colour replicas of the scrapbooks and photographs and encouraged to talk more broadly about their children’s experiences at home and school of learning to draw and model. In the third year the children were invited to talk with a close friend through the evidence recorded in the three years’ scrapbooks and photographs. These discussions were also (with their permission) taped. Thus we collected layers of rich data over the three years of the project.

Analysis of the data took evidence of the children’s activities as the starting point. This approach has been used in research into children’s emergent literacy by Bissex (1980) and Dyson (1989) and into children’s mark making/drawing by Matthews (1999) and Cox (1992). We were not concerned to code children’s drawings using developmental (Matthews, 1999) or technical (Cox, 1992) criteria. We were concerned with analysing the content and style of the children’s drawings. In the first analysis we coded the content of the drawings under people, places and things and looked for similarities and differences across the two contexts in what and how children drew. We also noted the children’s personal passions, any evidence of the influences of other forms of representation on what and how they chose to draw (media, hobbies, siblings, parents, extended family networks) and individual styles of drawing.
However, our main research question was how the sociocultural context and behaviour of significant others in the contrasting milieu of home and school affected what the children did or did not do in drawing behaviours. Therefore we triangulated evidence of the perspectives of the key players – the parents, practitioners and children – with the analysis of the visual data. This meant hours of examining and categorizing units of speech and contextual information referring to the children’s drawing activities. We worked on this independently, moving backwards and forwards between theoretical perspectives and evidence. We refined the domains for our analytical framework to:

- Observed/recorded child behaviours
- Distinctive features of the environment
- Values and beliefs of significant adults
- Adult styles of interaction
- Adult views of the children’s behaviours
- Children’s views of their behaviours

For the purposes of this article I intend to focus on the children’s drawings in their first year in pre-school or school and in the parallel period at home and the perspectives on their drawing activities of the parents and practitioners.¹

Evidence from the study: (1) Jake and Holly at home and in a nursery class

Babies explore mark making for kinaesthetic pleasure. They enjoy the movements made with their fingers and toes of food sliding across table surfaces, water flowing onto the sink drainer and later crayons and pens on paper or fingers on a screen. Sometimes they do not even look at the marks they are making; but they may focus intently on them (Matthew, 1999). Yet the mark making is always intentional. Toddlers begin to combine their marks into narratives involving accompanying sounds, words and actions. These drawings are the visual equivalent of dramatic/imaginative play bouts.

In our study we found that boys in particular persisted with these dynamic, physically active representations; but rarely received feedback from significant others – siblings, peer group or adults – since the drawings were often dismissed as ‘scribbling’. As Matthews (1999) points out, the mark making of young children is often a complex interaction between exploring the properties of a medium and concepts related to personal preoccupations or imagined and remembered episodes. Figures 1 and 2
show sequences of four-year-old Jake's two easel drawings of an elaborate narrative involving spells, castles and space. His mother was a teacher of seven- to eleven-year-olds. Her field notes capture the multi-modality of his speech, mark making and actions.
Ellie (his sister) and Jake were singing about magic spells. Jack was chanting and dancing. He went to the blackboard, picked up some chalk and drew a magic spell boat. He then continued to draw the boat, sea and gangway. He talked all the time, describing what he was drawing. The drawing was energetic and fluid. He used different colours and drew with the tip and side of the chalk. He made a spell to make lug worms. He chanted, ‘Abracadabra lug worms!’ striking the board with the red stick of chalk.

Next he picked up some felt tips and started drawing a castle. He talked all the time. He drew the castle, then cannons and finally the moat. He drew a poo dropping from the castle window and splashing in the moat and splashing on a ‘weetree’ in the bottom. He was saying, ‘These zigzags are the dungeons. The dots are the prisoners. The castle is a super spacer. It jumps into space in the night. It’s an electronic castle. This is the space castle. This is the mined baddie castle. This is a new goodie castle.’

Jake’s parents were relaxed about their children’s play and encouraged them to play out elaborate narratives in a relatively untidy house. The children were discouraged from watching much television but encouraged to listen to stories and enjoy books. Their father was a mechanical engineer. From an early age Jake played with boxes, tipping out the contents and imagining them as castles or vehicles. Jake’s passion was for making models in 3D using found materials or construction kits. His interests were ‘doing, making and exploring . . . a little experimenter’. His choice of objects to play with were ‘cars, lorries, vehicles, a tool set, swords, guns’. He was strongly attracted to anything to do with his father’s work as an engineer but also for example to maps, talking intently about journeys done on family days out or by his father for work. At just four years old he was frustrated by attempts to do representational drawings and chose not to do so at home.

Jake continued to reflect a personal interest in fast-moving machines in his drawings at home. He drew elaborate and fluid images of aeroplanes, rockets, fairground rides and farm machinery. The movement he represented was both spatial – the zigzags and spirals of movement from place to place – and temporal – duplications of images or reductions in sizes of objects to imply the speed of moving objects. The drawings were like dramatic play in line form and were often accompanied by elaborate quietly spoken narratives weaving together Jake’s experienced and imagined worlds. As Dyson (1989) writes ‘Children’s dramatic play and their imaginative drawings are their own re-playings and graphic organisations of their experienced worlds’ (p. 25).

His classmate, Holly’s home and family life was dominated by a succession of new babies, strong involvement with the local church community.
and regular Sunday extended family gatherings at her Nana’s (grandmother’s house). There was a strong sense of inter- and cross-generational support within the extended family. Her cousins, of various ages, were always provided with drawing materials to keep them occupied on Sundays while the adults talked. Her mother reported:

When she goes to our Mam’s, she’s just bought a sketchpad and she says when they’ve drawn a picture she wants to keep it. ‘I don’t want to rip the pages out. They can all draw, but I want to keep it’. She did it with us when we were little. She always played with us.

In Holly’s house, the children were rarely allowed to watch television. At the age of four Holly’s drawings, executed quickly and confidently, featured two key aspects of relationships. The first were spatial relationships of the significant spaces and places she experienced. She could recall and represent accurately the salient features of these places.

For example, Figure 3 shows one of several drawings we collected of the Church – including spaces where the adults and children gathered to worship and talk and where Darren played his guitar. As we found in many of the examples of children’s drawings of places, she always drew in the entrances and exits to significant rooms and buildings. It is as if children need to feel secure in the knowledge of how to get in and out of rooms.

The second aspect of relationships represented in her drawings was personal, affective relationships. She drew pictures of her family quickly and fluently. Often the figures were schematic, but again salient features were added in detail. An example is Figure 4, showing all members of her family, drawn when she was aged five. Holly’s mother explained that her mother-in-law had had twins: ‘Nana with babies in her tummy is from when Holly was talking about when she was younger and was having twins - Holly’s dad’s brothers.’ As she began to move her focus from family relationships to friendships, Holly’s personal narratives shifted to the ‘girlie’ interests projected within her significant friendships with older girls in the school playground and her older girl cousins. Friendships and family relationships were of overwhelming importance to her. She continued to play out a nurturing role for many hours with her favourite dolls. Her personal drawings continued to have a gendered focus on fashion for girls (particularly elaborate hairstyles and dresses); romance (such as in fairytales like The Little Mermaid or real life family weddings) and were often imbued with strong emotional content.

What happened to these two young fluent drawers when they entered the world of nursery education? Drawing was part of a much more
structured set of learning activities in the nursery class attached to the
well-established primary school where Jake and Holly were classmates.
Curriculum planning reflected the 'infant school' tradition of half-termly
topics. In the half term when we first visited the children, the topic was
Houses and Homes. At the beginning of each day, adult-led activities were set up involving four to six children at the table, some of which were art-based. They were offered to all the children at some point of the day. However, drawing was also offered as an ‘ongoing’ activity, always available.

Figure 4  Holly’s family

Houses and Homes. At the beginning of each day, adult-led activities were set up involving four to six children at the table, some of which were art-based. They were offered to all the children at some point of the day. However, drawing was also offered as an ‘ongoing’ activity, always available.
to the children, and often used as a ‘settling’ activity or a source of security for children not yet brave enough to venture from seat-based activities to more active play-based activities.

The discourse of the nursery class teacher and nursery nurse was around child development. For example, they believed that drawing was useful for developing fine motor skills:

... beginning to hold a pencil and realising there are different ways of making marks with different materials, selecting the correct materials for the purpose ... the right paper ... so doing a plan in the construction area or the brick corner they might use squared paper.

They referred also to cognitive gains from drawing: ‘to record pictorially the things that they’ve learnt, to reinforce new concepts’. It was taken for granted that drawing should be representational:

H/She should be doing representational drawings, perhaps linked to topic work or experiences they’ve had at the weekend or night before. If we’ve done a focused activity we like the children to record pictorially the things that they’ve learnt, to reinforce the new concepts as well.

Both Jake and Holly found strategies to cope with loss of autonomy in the transition from free choice at home to adult-directed drawings as representations in the nursery class setting. Examples of their responses to the set task of Draw a House are given in Figures 5 and 6. Jake’s picture of a house was done quickly and without much enthusiasm. His only interest in it was the novelty of the chalk as a medium for drawing. He returned as soon as he decently could to a 3D-construction activity. Holly completed her ‘map’ of her journey to school following a wet sand activity where she had been asked by an adult to model the journey in 3D. Thus she converted the task of Draw a House to something that allowed her to explore her interest in spatial relationships. Her favoured activities in the nursery class were those related to domestic role-play. In the relatively constrained context of the topic-based nursery class, neither child showed the spontaneous, spirited approach they manifested in their home-based drawing. They were sharp enough to realize that those kinds of drawings did not figure on the nursery class agenda.

In the summer he left the nursery class and before he started school, Jake’s mother coached him in letter and number recognition and recording. She was shrewd enough to recognize that Jake would rapidly become bored with school if he were seat-based much of the day. She explained to him that he would be expected to be able to write letters and numbers at school and that if he could do them, the teacher would let him choose, and
then he would be able to do his beloved 3D modelling. She proved to be absolutely right.

Holly’s mother, less conditioned to the culture of schooling, warned her as she moved to Year One after two terms in a Reception class: ‘You won’t
be able to play quite as much you know. . . . I think they have got sand and water . . . but there are no dolls or anything like that.’ This last statement must have struck Holly particularly hard. She proved to be a ‘reluctant’ reader and writer. Her reception class teacher dismissed her attempts to draw and write as ‘untidy’ work. There was a continual battle between her
and her mum about the daily expectation of doing her reading ‘homework’. Holly told us: ‘I don’t like reading . . . When I’ve got a new school book I have to read it . . . My mam gets it out and she wants me to do it but I don’t want to do it.’

Evidence from the study: (2) Luke at home and in the family centre

Luke lived on an inner city estate with his mother, father and younger brother. When he was three years old both he and his brother attended a Family Centre for part of the week. The drawings collected by his mother at home reveal a preoccupation with scary things. He drew on moving imagery from videos and television to inform his fertile imagination. In one of his play bouts his mother described him frantically ‘rowing’ a baby bath with coat hangers across the living room floor where cushions were strategically placed as stepping stones. The adventure was about avoiding the crocodiles as he rowed across a river. The scariness was also about fun in the family collective consciousness. For example, his mother often sang and danced with the children at the end of the day during what she called our ‘silly time’: ‘We’ve a song about crocodiles from Pontins when I was a kid. Never smile at a crocodile.’ Figure 7 is Luke’s drawing of a crocodile with scary teeth.

Figure 8 reflects the power of moving images from television on Luke. His mother explained that he was both fascinated and repelled by a bizarre advertisement for fruit pastilles that featured a strawberry eating a little boy. She reported, ‘When he watches you can see him backing away from the telly.’

Luke retained his interest in scary things throughout the three years of the project. His mother said: ‘He likes being scared, not too scared obviously, but he loves making people jump. He loves being jumped on as long as he knows it’s going to happen.’ His interest in ‘play fighting’ was encouraged by his father who regularly played rough and tumble games with the two brothers to ‘toughen them up’. His mother colluded with his sense of drama:

The night before Halloween there was a film, Hocus Pocus, with witches and it was a bit scary. But what we did was we turned all the lights off, and put the pumpkin on top of the telly and lit it.

The influence of TV and video imagery was strong in Luke’s representations in drawings and role-play. His favourite video remained Jurassic Park and his favourite shop the Disney Shop.
Luke was the youngest child in our sample and spent two years in the day-care setting. This was a different kind of context from the nurseries and reception classes attached to schools where the other children were based. In parent and toddler and playgroups in the voluntary sector and day-care

Figure 7 Luke's crocodile

Luke was the youngest child in our sample and spent two years in the day-care setting. This was a different kind of context from the nurseries and reception classes attached to schools where the other children were based. In parent and toddler and playgroups in the voluntary sector and day-care
nurseries or family centres in the maintained sector in the UK there has traditionally been a relaxed attitude to children’s drawing activities (Delicio and Rearden, 1995; Matthews, 1992). Mark making materials are set out on a table for children to choose freely or incorporated into role play.

Figure 8  Luke’s strawberry eating a little boy
activities such as a mock up office, shop or domestic play area. Most practitioners in the voluntary and day-care sectors are tuned by their work culture and training more into interventions in children’s oral language development than into working closely with young children on developing their graphacy skills. Their other major preoccupation is with the social behaviours of young children.

However in 1996 an 'educational component' in the form of curriculum guidelines for three- and four-year-olds, the Desirable Learning Outcomes (Department for Education and Employment [DfEE]/Social Curriculum and Assessment Authority [SCAA], 1996), was introduced into these settings in the UK by the DfEE. A revised version, the Early Learning Goals, was introduced in 2000 (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority [QCA], 2000). Day-care practitioners’ concerns shifted to school versions of literacy and numeracy, when they sat with children at the mark making tables. This shift towards educational outcomes left practitioners in day-care and voluntary sector settings feeling deskilled. They felt that their natural preference for informal exchanges embedded in the ‘everydayness’ of shared routines around playing, eating and domesticity was disregarded as trivial. Uneasily they began to adopt the discourse and activities of ‘educational’ activities, disembedded from the former spontaneity of their shared activities with children (Anning and Edwards, 1999).

When we talked to the staff in the Family Centre they were clearly feeling the pressure to embrace ‘school’ versions of literacy and were communicating this to the children’s parents. The manager felt that mark making had been reconfigured towards representational drawing and emergent literacy. For example, she referred to a preoccupation with writing:

> When they (the practitioners) hear mark making, it doesn’t matter how many times you go through it, they still think writing. That’s there at the back of their minds all the time. That’s not to say that if a child did a row of circles they wouldn’t be impressed by that, but only because it’s started to look like letters. They feel that’s what they ought to be . . . they know the benefits, they know the therapy that children get from expressing, from experiencing. But their own vulnerability will always lead them to think in terms of writing, particularly if they’re talking to knowledgeable people.

We recorded many examples when practitioners paid careful attention to writing the children’s names on their drawings without having any dialogue with the children about their drawings. The message for the children was that what mattered to the adults was the letters of their name; their drawing was not important. Other activities with line focused around drawing and colouring in shapes for the ‘pre-maths’ profile. However, the
staff in the Family Centre were the only early years practitioners over the three years of the project who knew of and actively encouraged children to talk about their favourite TV programmes and videos. It seems only now are researchers beginning to explore the links between young children's comprehension of non-print narratives and their later reading comprehension ability. For example, Kremer and colleagues (Kremer et al., 2002) reported that 30 USA children's understandings of cartoons at age 6 correlated with reading comprehension skills at 8. It may be that Luke benefited from his exposure to adults in the day-care setting who shared his interest in non-print narratives.

Luke rarely chose freely to draw in the Family Centre. He was much more interested in active, mostly outdoor, play with other boys. But in the afternoons the children were expected to work with their key worker in a base room. The staff had adopted a developmental record sheet, marking children's progress from horizontal and vertical marks to drawing figures to letter formation. The drawing of his mammy (Figure 9) that Luke, at the age of three, did with his key worker illustrates the pressure to push children along this 'developmental' continuum. As he worked on the drawing he was shown where to draw the eyes and nose. The drawing shows none of the fluency and passion of his home-based drawings of the scary crocodile and boy eating strawberry. His key worker described how she tried to support children in 'improving' their drawing:

Perhaps there's something in the profile - is able to draw a face - and you think 'I haven't seen him do that, so you sit with him and say, 'Shall we see what we can do?'

She described how she prompted the children: 'Oh look you could do a circle for a face, two eyes, a nose and a mouth. See if you can do that.' The practitioners were unsure if these kinds of strategies were 'the right thing to do'.

Sometimes I'm not quite sure what I should say. But if they're drawing a picture of a car, I'll say, 'That's the roof and that's the wheels' and I'll say 'Let's see if we can find a book with a picture of a car?' Then we'll talk about it, what we can transfer to the drawing.

They were at a loss as to how to respond to the kind of active, non-representational drawings done by the children, other than the classic 'What is it?'

The education agenda colonized Luke's home as well as day-care environment. In response to his key worker's suggestion, Luke's mother began to encourage him to draw figures. It was an uphill struggle. She said: "He won't
draw people. Very, very rarely people. . . . just colours in a shape. He’ll do a circle and colour it in. Then a triangle and colour it in.’ She described his frustration at trying to represent things: ‘He’ll draw a car. Then he gets really frustrated because it isn’t how he sees a car and scribbles it out.’ He remained highly critical of his mother’s attempts to draw for him: ‘That doesn’t look nowt like a cat. Where’s its tail?’ When he was four Luke’s mother, anxious to help him prepare for school, bought him workbooks.
He loved these routine, non-representational activities. His mother reported:

We've got this learning to write things and it's like mazes when you've got to go a certain way, and he's fantastic with them. He loves doing them, going through the gaps and doing squiggles.

But writing letters and numbers frustrated him. 'He gets really anxious and upset that he can't do it right.'

Evidence from the study: (3) Lianne at home and in a Reception class

Lianne's household was warm and accepting. She and her brother, Terry, were encouraged to play freely around the house without continual pressure to tidy away their toys. Much of their play was elaborate role-play. Storying was everywhere - through toys, pets, TV and video, books and drawings. Terry, three years older, helped her to draw and gave her lots of positive feedback.

He thinks they [her drawings] are beautiful and if she does something he thinks is really good he gets excited and says, 'Lianne's done this, Lianne's done this.'

Lianne was a strong character and accomplished in enticing other members of the family into her extended bouts of dramatic play. Her mother was a powerful advocate in defending the children's meaning making and arguing for it to be taken seriously by the whole community:

Me and her Dad are Grandma and Granddad and she gives us the baby to hold and she goes to work and she tells us what time she's coming home and if they've been naughty.

The men in the household had to be educated into respect for Lianne's meaning making. For example, her Dad, mucking about with Lianne's older brother, made the mistake of drop kicking one of Lianne's dolls across the living room. Lianne's outrage, backed up by her Mum, put paid to such behaviour. Her Mum reported, 'Well I told them off. You haven't to do that because she really loves the babies.' Now both the father and grandfather respectfully hold the 'babies' when Lianne is in role-play. 'She wraps the babies in shawls and say, “Granddad, you'll have to mind the baby”, and they're all part of it now.' Thus Lianne has learned from her mother that she can gain support and respect from three generations of men in the household. There is give and take between the men and women in the family. On Sundays the men go down to the local club before lunch, but
everyone is expected to sit down to family board and card games in the afternoon.

Lianne's mother was a classroom support assistant in the school where Lianne was in the Reception class when we first encountered her at the age of four. As she made the transition to school, school rituals and activities dominated her role-play. Her mother colluded in setting up a 'school' in Lianne's bedroom. It took up so much space that Lianne had to move to sleep into her brother's room. Again Lianne was 'in charge' in her role-play, organizing the soft toys into 'ability groups', reading the 'whole class' stories and awarding the toys stamps on a weekly 'achievement chart'. She drew on her experience of watching her mother at work as well as her experience of being a pupil. Her mother reported:

She's made a classroom in her bedroom and she's stayed there, it must have been three and a half hours yesterday. It took shape yesterday morning because I'd put a little desk in, moved it out of Terry's room, and she's got all her paper in and the crayons, and when I went up she said, 'Can I have a meeting so I can tell you what the kids have done?' That's me on a Monday morning. She has to sit there while I go to the staff meeting. But I was busy and when I went in she was reading a story, pretending to read. She's got a Barbie stamp set and she'd made them all a stamp card. She came downstairs with the stamp cards. 'I'll show you what the kids have done.' All the teddy bears and everything lined up. Unbelievable.

Lianne's transition into the Reception class of an inner city primary school at the age of four was enhanced by the fact that her mother, as a classroom support assistant in the school, straddled the social worlds of home and school. Lianne was also lucky enough to be in an early years setting where both the teacher and the nursery nurse were respectful of the children's personal representations. The reception class teacher was less preoccupied with topics or themes and more inclined to base her planning on observations of the children's concerns. There was a meaning making area where children drew freely 'themselves, members of the family, pets, houses. A core of the children enjoys drawing grandma's dog because they can draw it well so they keep doing it...'

However, this confident teacher was perplexed about the relationship between her 'directive' approach to children's writing and her 'supportive' approach to their drawings:

When we did self-portraits I drew my face on the board first and detailed our eyebrows and noses ... but I think this happens less. I don't mind if they're less accurate in their drawings than in their writing. I'll say, 'Oh, you've written your name, but go and get your name card because you haven't written your 'e' the right way round', and I'd be more tuned into correcting their writing. But I
shouldn’t be really should I? If a child brought a drawing to me and it was a huge potato head and a small body I wouldn’t correct them. I’d say, ‘Oh that’s lovely, you’ve got a big smiley face, that’s great.’ But if it was more directed teaching, as still life or a more observational drawing . . . but I think you can accept what a child has drawn more than when they’ve been writing. Sometimes I’ve stopped myself saying, ‘Dogs don’t have five legs do they?’ because if that child’s representation has six legs, that’s them expressing themselves. It’s artistic licence.

She was aware of Lianne’s personal drawings, and content to let them roll. She knows what she likes. She likes to please me. But at the same time I look at her in the mark making area and she’s content to do things and she doesn’t always show me. Sometimes I notice she’s putting things in her drawer, folding them and putting them away.’

Figure 10 is a drawing initiated by Lianne herself. Her teacher commented:

This is a maths activity. We were playing Ten in the Bed – ten teddies and ten numbered cards . . . She later wanted to draw the ten teddies and as she was singing, ‘And there were ten in the bed’, she crossed them off. She’s singing her
head off and throwing the bears out, and she'd jump back, and then she'd go back to the paper.

This is a good example of a child representing her thinking through the multi-modes of singing, physical actions and graphical representation. There is, as Kress (1997: 97) points out, no separation for the child of body and mind. Her graphical representations are at various levels of abstractions. Her drawings of the bears are first order symbols and the crossing out, tallying and numbers show a sophisticated grasp of second order symbols. The child’s engagement is total and her singing and dancing indicate an emotional satisfaction with what she is doing. Body, mind and emotions are in harmony. It was rare for us to observe these kinds of episodes in the school classrooms providing education for these seven young children over the three years of the project. Yet Goodman (1969) reminds us that the cognitive “does not exclude the sensory or emotive . . . what we know throughout is felt in our bones and nerves and muscles as well as grasped in our minds . . . all the sensitivity and responsiveness of the organism participates in the invention and interpretation of symbols” (quoted in Buckham, 1994: 140).

A final drawing to illustrate Lianne’s multi-modal meaning making at school was created in response to a narrative invented by the teacher about a new ‘pupil’, a bear, too shy to come out of the stock cupboard. Lianne wrote the message to him shown in Figure 11 to try to entice the bear out of the cupboard to join the class. The shy bear is on the left. She explained that the bear on the right was her own teddy bear at home wanting to make friends. She ‘read’ the letters as, ‘PLEASE COME OUT’. The rainbow shapes at the bottom of the page were bear caves to make him feel at home. Lianne posted this message under the stock cupboard door. To her delight, in the hand of her teacher, the bear wrote back to her. He asked if he could go home with her at the weekend to play with her bear. Of course her mum was complicit in the story. A triumphant Lianne took the two bears everywhere with her that weekend, including the weekend shop at the supermarket. Photos were returned to school with the bear and their adventures told by Lianne and the teacher to an enthralled class of thirty. Lianne was learning that stories in drawn, written and spoken forms can be co-constructed by adults and children from their shared experiences and that each can have equal status in the telling.

The crossroad of home and school

Some of the seven children we tracked in the research project were lucky enough to encounter significant adults in early childhood learning.
environments supportive of their approaches to meaning making. Their joint involvement episodes around graphicy were productive and reciprocal experiences for both child and adult. We observed how these children’s capabilities to draw for personal/social and communicative purposes flourished. In this first year of the project Lianne is an example of a child in this fortunate position, though when she entered a more

Figure 11 Lianne’s letter to school bear
formal classroom the following September she was an unhappy pupil and declared herself bored by school.

Our evidence across the seven cases was that the children encountered adults with very different attitudes to and understandings of the power of graphicity and narratives not embedded in books as they moved from class to class, often in the same setting. Where powerful adults were driven by the ‘folklore’ of infant schooling defined by King (1978) as ‘the story worlds of reading, the writing worlds of news and story, and the worlds of number and mathematics’ (p. 34), the children’s personal versions of meaning making were under-valued and rapidly shaped into ‘educational’ versions. These were dominated by the imperative to get children writing as quickly as possible. The practitioners appeared to be ill-prepared in approaches to supporting children in learning to draw and confused about the relationship between children learning to draw and to write.

Where children received little feedback from adults on their ‘messages’ for others in graphic forms, often created in free play activities or in ‘wet playtimes’, they closed down on this aspect of communication. They drew less and less in school. When they did, it was in response to an adult-directed task or agenda with an ‘educational’ purpose, for which they showed little enthusiasm or commitment.

We observed that for some of the children their meaning making at home remained a consuming interest. They created a secret world of home-based personal narratives, often informed by popular culture and imagery or based on passions for fashion, football, pop music or video imagery. These personal representations were strongly informed by gendered interests modelled within their communities of practice, often shared across several generations and modelled in extended family networks. Graphicity was clearly identified as a sociocultural activity. The communicative, social function of the children’s home meaning making was often to bond with siblings and friends who shared their preoccupations or to send greetings to loved ones.

Our research suggests that at the crossroad of moving from home to school, changes in versions of graphicity mark a significant cultural step for children in the way their representations are received and shaped. Within institutional contexts the shaping of their meaning making is relentlessly towards school versions of literacy and numeracy. The children’s agenda and purposes for their representations are rarely taken seriously. Yet I would argue that adults in early years settings should pay the same attention to episodes of children drawing, tuning into personal and social as well as for cognitive purposes, as they currently do to sharing episodes of reading books with them. I would also like to see far more attention paid
by early years practitioners to narratives created by young children in non-print modes. This broadening of our understanding of the beginnings of literacy needs to be reflected in initial teacher training for those intending to teach young children and in Foundation Degree programmes. This way our approach to teaching literacy may begin to look forward to the future rather than backwards to basics.

Note
1. Details of the research methodology, including a paper on the ethics and practicalities of researching with young children, can be found at the BERA conference papers site on http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/000001177.htm and http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/00001505.htm

References


ANNING: THE GRAPHICACY CLUB


Correspondence to:
ANGELA ANNING, University of Leeds, School of Education, Hillary Place, Leeds, LS2 9JT, UK. [email: A.J.E.Anning@education.leeds.ac.uk]