

Child Faber: Child the Maker



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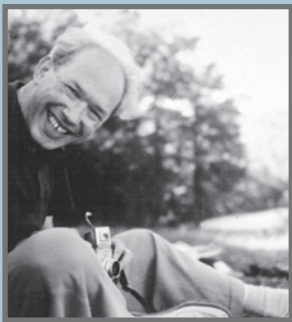
Almost a dozen years have passed since I moved to State College, Pennsylvania—the small, university town where Viktor Lowenfeld taught for the last 14 years of his life, from 1946 until 1960. Fifty-some years later, State College remains a small town by most standards. For many Penn State undergraduates, perhaps then and certainly now, it is the “big city” in comparison to their miniscule Pennsylvania hometowns, where facing rows of houses line the highways, two blocks deep and a mile long. Still, those of us who live here year round celebrated the recent opening of a Trader Joe’s as a significant cultural event, and eagerly await the appearance of an IHOP in the spring. This week’s spring break is greeted with a deep sigh of relief: There are parking spaces available and restaurants with no wait. And yet, I often think how much has changed in State College and the wider world since Lowenfeld died quite prematurely at the age of 57. While he might still recognize his College Heights neighborhood, he would find the landscape increasingly uncanny the farther he strolled toward campus, town, and the surrounding areas of residence and commerce.

It is not surprising, of course, that things have changed in 50 years; but given the rapidity of change in the ways that we live now, the things we assume and depend upon, the reach and tenacity of Lowenfeld’s influence in art education around the world is startling. It is slightly ironic, as well. Lowenfeld was very much a man of his time, convinced that authenticity demands that we work with

materials available in our own time and place. He applied this dictum to both the physical world of objects/things and the intellectual realm of ideas and concepts born of a particular zeitgeist.

As we know, Lowenfeld was strongly affected by the events of his time, by his experiences in Vienna and his work with blind and partially sighted children and youth, by the outbreak of war and the persecution of Jewish people and other marginalized groups, by his relocation and reinvention in a new land. Many of his signature beliefs—from his certainty regarding developmental progressions in children’s artmaking to his confidence in the diagnostic power of children’s art—seem less certain to us now, positioned as we are in different times and places, immersed in different material and intellectual realities. And yet, Lowenfeld remains a part of the “usable past” (Brooks, 1915) that we share as art educators, of that assemblage or selection of enduring orientations, attitudes, and perspectives that continue to inform us and shape our attitudes and practices long after the specifics of their historical origins have faded.

It is undeniably true that some of Lowenfeld’s most revolutionary theories are no longer as useful as they were at the time they were proposed. His description of children’s development in art continues to influence art teaching, even in an age when the concept of universal and predictable stages of child development is widely disavowed and more sociocultural understanding of artmaking prevails. Lowenfeld’s stage theory remains appealing to those who



Viktor Lowenfeld, 1903-1960

The Lowenfeld Award was established in 1960 by friends and former students of Viktor Lowenfeld to honor an NAEA member who has made significant contributions to the field of art education through the years. The award winner presents a lecture on a topic of his or her choice at the annual NAEA National Convention.

are becoming acquainted with children's drawings for the first time, in the process of acquiring the understanding and appreciation for children's work that is essential for teachers to possess. Here is a system, a structure, where all else is flow. Here, too, is a rationale for positioning art at the center of the curriculum, for Lowenfeld argued persuasively that children's art both reflects and supports the growth of the child.

Eventually, more often than not, those who spend time with children making art in classrooms begin to notice that things may not be unfolding as we learned that they should, in the manner Lowenfeld predicted. Where are the baselines, single or multiple, the flat planes, and full frontal symmetry that we might expect? Where are the static depictions of house, car, tree, person, and dog that speak of an intimate attachment to home? What do we make of the gestures and sound effects that accompany drawings in the making, the commentary and response, the intensely social activity that drawing promotes and provokes? We come to understand the limitations of developmental stages and theories and the different contexts that allow contemporary teachers and researchers to recognize other things happening when children draw, other aspects of children drawing, and the profound difference between the experience of one child drawing in the company of an intrigued and charismatic adult and a classroom filled with children drawing together.

Lowenfeld knew that childhood could be a complex and troubled time. Many of the children he worked with and wrote about were unsettled, cast off, or reeling from their exposure to conflicts and dangers precipitated by adults. His sensitivity to the "estate of childhood" (Hawkins, 1974/2002), his desire to preserve children's deep and fearless engagement with the world or to restore that condition if it were lost, reflected his commitment to childhood and his belief children's right to a peaceful existence. His appreciation for the wisdom of children, his delight in

the ingenuity of their representations, his hope that the cultivation of creative potential in every child would somehow diminish the impulse to destroy the other—these threads glisten through his writing, marking him as a man whose image of the child was hopeful and nurturing. After all he had done and seen in his short lifetime, State College circa 1946 must have seemed an oasis of peace and sanity.

An artist with a clinical bent, Lowenfeld valued children's graphic explorations and listened to the stories that emerge and twine around the activity of drawing. The stories he told, in his books and lectures, reflect Lowenfeld's own psychological orientation and interests in the child's history and the sequence of drawings and dialogues that occurred between child and adult, child and world. These stories belong to a strongly narrative tradition in art education research and teaching—an orientation toward childhood that acknowledges that there is, almost always, more than meets the eye where children are concerned. I am honored to be recognized as a participant in this tradition of deeply engaged work with children and the project of helping others to see the value and complexity of their art.

And so, a story:

"So," Alexis began, "you have a husband?" Amused by the frank curiosity and verbal panache of this 4-year-old girl who had just settled at the drawing table for the first time, apparently eager to strike up a very adult conversation with the stranger in her classroom, I admitted that I did, indeed, have a husband. I hesitated, wondering for a moment if I should try to explain that said husband was in Pennsylvania while I was spending the semester in Chicago, drawing in sketchbooks with preschoolers enrolled in her Head Start program. Would any part of that make sense to a young city child? Alexis saved me from plunging into this tangled explanation. She had asked the question for a reason. "I'm going to get married," she told me, "and I already know who. He's over there," she said, pointing to Teddy, a

handsome young man who, at that moment, was running around the room with his compadres in a decidedly undomesticated fashion.

I came to know Alexis—and to a lesser extent, Teddy—quite well over the next few months as I returned to their classroom each week to draw with whichever children chose to visit the sketchbook table during their free activity time. Alexis was a regular. Teddy often seemed torn by the necessity of choosing among several equally attractive possibilities, and often found ways to combine them—from dressing up in *casita* (housekeeping) to building structures in the block area that then needed to be supplemented by diagrams in his sketchbook. Sometimes Alexis persuaded him to join us at the drawing table, and sometimes Teddy asserted his independence and went off to pursue interests of his own. Generally a man of few words, Teddy seemed content to let Alexis do the talking much of the time. And talk she did!

I quickly learned that Alexis was the only girl and the youngest child in a family of five brothers, that the mother she lived with was her "second mother," and that her first mother died in Mexico when Alexis was an infant, allegedly a victim of a violent crime. Alexis shared this last, startling disclosure in the same matter-of-fact way that she later confided that her dog had been attacked the previous afternoon by a "zombie dog" loose in the neighborhood, the same tone that other children used when they reported that their mother had seen a rat in their apartment and screamed, or that their daddy had hit their mother in the stomach. These were incidents reported without context or elaboration—clearly things that struck the children as distressing, but not to be dwelt upon or belabored or even addressed in drawings. They were just things that happened, part of the complex lives they shared as young children growing up in a community where large families, crowded apartments, and financial constraints were common. These were experiences that did not seem to be routine, but

accepted as part of the children's lives, part of the experience they bring with them to the classroom.

The most poignant drawings were not those that explored the exploits of superheroes or monsters or ghosts. More disturbing by far than any drawings inspired by the media were drawings in which the children themselves created characters and placed them in predicaments where life and death hung in the balance.

Alexis and Teddy were drawing together, alone, at a table just to the side of the larger one where other children were working that day.¹ Their isolation was chosen in the interest of excluding others, in being conspicuously alone and together. Their distance from the group also provided opportunity for some subversive play, inspired by the juiciness of a special red marker, elaborated in a drawing of murder and mayhem.

Elsewhere in the classroom, a child belted out the series of notes that precede the call of "Charge!" at Chicago Bulls basketball games not far from the preschool where I sat, surrounded by children drawing. Alexis and Teddy turned to look his way, but quickly resumed their drawing. Teddy's marks were short and scattered, a blood splatter in the making. Alexis applied black marker to a bloody pool. "And, you know, we..." Alexis paused as she drew, then completed her thought, advising Teddy, "be careful, 'cuz there's blood all over the place. And this body that we're killing..." Teddy squirmed visibly and pressed his own, capped marker into the crook of his arm, attempting to divert the conversation in the direction of his own recent inoculation. Alexis drew with energetic strokes, repeating, "and the blood... and the blood... and the blood..." Teddy stopped to watch. Minutes later, Alexis sprang from her chair, a blur, playfully pouncing on Teddy, pretending to strangle him. He protested, "Hey, stop that!" glancing my way, (I suspect) to see whether I disapproved, as to seek adult intervention. To Alexis he said, "Stop trying to be a monster!"

Next to me, Melanie was feeling neglected: first by Alexis—her former "BFF"—and then by me, as I continued to watch and film the nearby massacre in the making. She, too, had been listening to Alexis and Teddy's conversation. She waved her hand in front of the camera lens: "Teacher, look at my blood!" "What happened to your hand?" I asked, with due concern as I noted the blood stump she had attached to her drawing of herself. "I cut myself," she replied, "Look it! Look it!"

Alexis visited the larger table in search of fresh markers. Melanie paused to watch her former best friend's every move. Behind us, Teddy expanded and intensified his bloody scribble until Alexis returned. Plopping a new set of markers on the table, she cackled gleefully in a manner meant to be sinister. Teddy stretched his arm toward her, to silence her or to ward off her advances. "I'm gonna kill somebody," Alexis mused quietly, picking up and examining the markers in which an inky reservoir of "blood" floated inside the barrels. Teddy, trying to get into the

spirit of things, dramatically stroked his own turquoise marker over the vivid red patch he had drawn earlier, holding it up toward Alexis and proclaiming with ghoulish delight, "Oh, it's black!" As Alexis sorted through the remaining markers in their plastic box, Melanie implored, "Teacher, teacher, can I tell you something? Alexis doesn't want to be my friend. I just want to be her friend and she just wants Teddy." "She wants Teddy to be her friend?" I asked. "No, *her* friend," Melanie corrected me. Alexis and Teddy appeared to be oblivious to Melanie's plaint. I made plitudinous teacher noises: "What do you think about that? It's good to have lots of friends." Melanie continued, "When somebody else talks to her, says, 'I wanna be your friend,' she just says 'NO.'" In the background, Alexis cackled once again, as Melanie, smiling her sweetest smile, held up her picture of a bloody, severed limb, ready to be photographed. "Tell me what happened to your hand there," I asked. "She doesn't have it any more," Melanie answered, matter-of-factly.



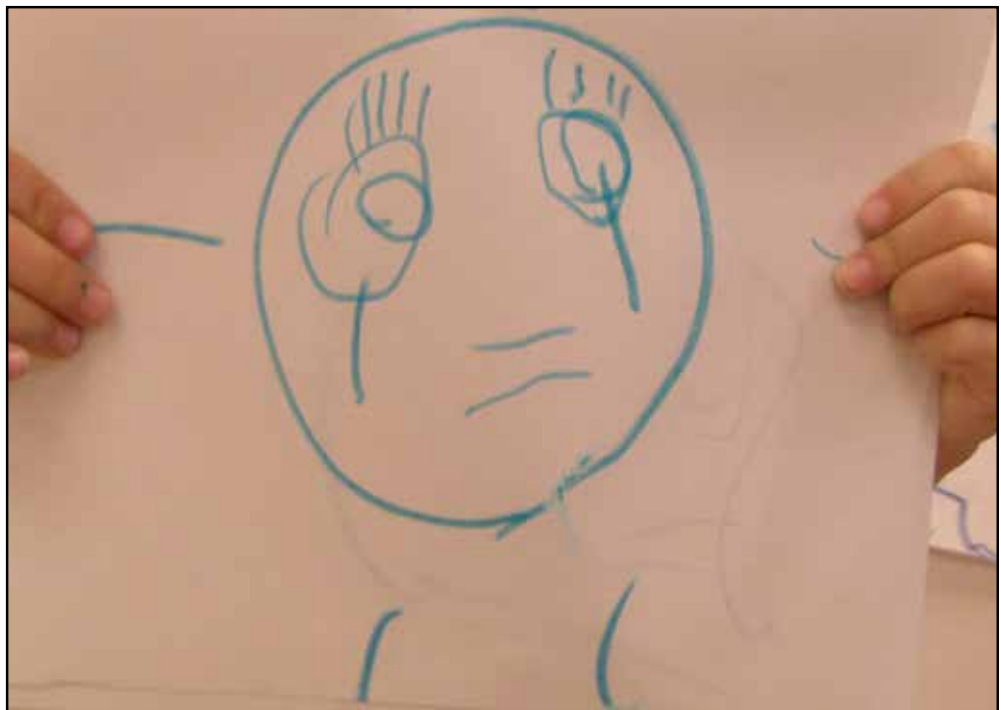
Murder and jealousy are undeniably the stuff of which great art is made—but we are surprised, if not shocked, to find these themes so starkly present in preschool. How do we reconcile our belief in the innocence of young children with the ghoulish delight and deliberation with which Alexis and Teddy planned and executed the demise of “this body”? How do we interpret these exchanges when we learn that the children involved are enrolled in a Head Start program in a depressed neighborhood in a major American city? Does the fact that these children may have witnessed murders that were not contained by a video screen change the terms of their participation in the world-making narratives (Wilson & Wilson, 2010) that drawing encourages, making them more or less acceptable as a form of play with the boundaries of what is possible? How does our image of the child adapt to the (apparently) “knowing” children (Higgonet, 1998) in our classrooms?

Alexis, Teddy, and Melanie introduce us to issues that are basic to emerging trends and issues in contemporary art education. The stories they enacted in the classroom that morning are complex—as their personalities and lives are complex—performed through

talk and gestures, glances and grimaces, words and drawings. Had we simply encountered the three drawings that the children produced at some later moment, without having witnessed the event of their making, much of the meaning would be lost to us. We would not necessarily recognize them as scenes of violence and mayhem at all, or we might interpret their gory and expressionistic markings as symptoms of pathology, the sad preoccupations of children living in a neighborhood where real violence is, in fact, a constant threat. No matter which interpretation we formed, we could not fully appreciate the pathos or the playfulness interwoven in this drawing event, the exploratory nature of the drawings, or the intensity of the interactions surrounding them. We would not see them as an integral part of daily life in this classroom, informed by interpersonal histories and curiosities and the need to make sense of lives that are neither innocent nor predictable.

This small incident, dramatic as it may seem, is in many ways an ordinary event of classroom life, in this and other early childhood settings where children are encouraged to participate in various forms of artmaking in the company of peers and interested adults. While

the slogan “Process not product” has long been a central recommendation for teaching early childhood art, research in the field has focused all but exclusively on the products of children’s work. Philip Pearson (2001) suggests that many studies of child art, regardless of disciplinary origin or perspective, have concentrated on children’s drawings as artifacts, rather than children drawing (i.e., individuals engaged in complex productive activities in specific material, social, and cultural contexts). Close-up views of artmaking as it happens provide insight into the making process that is available in no other way, and allow us to understand children’s artmaking in all of its variety. The range of questions and issues raised by close attention to what occurs within and around the child drawing (or constructing/shooting videos) expands exponentially as we begin to see and hear the influences that converge in the simplest of images. Significantly, the role of the researcher shifts from that of disinterested observer or mere instigator to the active participant, interacting with children in ways that mirror the role of teachers and embody a “pedagogy of listening” (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 114).



Stories of Children and Youth: Developing Firsthand Dialogical Relationships

“Questions of whether children and youth have anything to contribute to a society’s cultural capital are customarily so self-answering that any other view of the issue seems startling. In the economies of cultural production, the years of childhood are only a bridge to a future time.”
(Paley, 1995, pp. 3-4)

Much of what we know about children is “made up knowledge,” in the words of early childhood educators Elizabeth Graue and Daniel Walsh (1998)—the faint echo of research or experience that is popularized and passed on as slogans and generalizations. We learn that young children are egocentric, for example, and construct our expectations and curriculum accordingly. We do not expect preschoolers to interact with one another, to be interested in one another’s stories. They engage, we are told, in parallel play, drawing in close proximity but without any real interest in or attention to other children close by. Oh, and their attention spans are miniscule: Don’t expect them to pursue projects of long duration or to remain interested in any one pursuit for long. We have it on good authority that children cannot do these things before they reach the age of reason, and our faith in that authority is so strong that we often fail to believe what we see with our own eyes.

Evidence that contradicts these assumptions is everywhere in preschool classrooms. Drawings are one way that children entertain, entangle, challenge, or provoke one another. Drawing an expanded version of Andrew’s family, including a baby sister who did not exist, was a sure way for Alexia to push his buttons. Watching another child draw is a frequent practice, a way of learning how it is done or simply listening to a story as it unfolds. One morning, in a classroom down the hall from the one where Alexis and Teddy carried on their complicated relationship, 4-year-old Andrea drew a simple scene and presented it to

her teacher, asking her to caption the drawing, “Mr. Sun hiding behind a tree and the birdies flying to the water.” Across the room, Julian continued his drawing, one of a series featuring his friends as superheroes. There was no sign that he had paid the least bit of attention to Andrea or her drawing until he approached his teacher to request that she inscribe a title on his drawing. Straight-faced, he asked that she write, “Me and my friends, killing Mr. Sun.” It was a classic preschool moment, a glimpse of the wry humor, intelligence, and recognition of difference that animates the lives of children who spend their days together for long periods of time.

Many years ago, in the short-lived journal *Phenomenology + Pedagogy*, Kate Meyer-Drawe (1986) acknowledged how important it is for teachers and researchers to possess “the capability to be surprised by children” (p. 48), not to assume that we know what there is to know about the children we encounter, but to continually cultivate our capacity to watch and listen to children acting and to learn from them. Fortunately, young children tend to relish and actively seek adult attention. Meyer-Drawe characterizes their approach to others as indirect, a form of entanglement and captivation achieved by lateral movement: “They thread themselves into our perception from the sides, they join in or entangle us in their acting, they involve themselves in our communication or ensnare us in their talking” (p. 53).

It may be particularly important to focus our attention on the activities of young children, for children’s willingness to share their worlds with adults is transitory. Older children may be less comfortable in the presence of adult interest, as a 6th grader suggested to Vivian Gussin Paley (2004):

Like those kindergarten kids on the playground! They keep yelling to their teacher, “watch me! Watch me!” It’s weird really. They want to be watched all the time, just the opposite of us. (p. 95)

The boundaries that young children respect are relatively few—far less stable, opaque, or rigidly controlled than those that older children strive to maintain (Thompson, 2009). Drawing is an intensely social activity in early-childhood classrooms, before children learn that drawing is considered a silent and solitary activity in school, where they are expected to draw without talking, with their eyes on their own papers. Often accompanied and supplemented by words, gestures, and sound effects, drawings are performed as multiple expressive languages converge and amplify one another. The finished product is a palimpsest, which may provide little clue to the complexity of thought and action that occurred around the drawing page, as images are layered and sometimes obliterated and narratives evolve. The stories that accompany drawings are almost always more improvisational and exciting, if not more cryptic, than the labels, titles, or captions children dictate when their drawings are finished.

The social life of the preschool classroom is facilitated by the visibility of drawings and the appeal of shared interests, and also by the amount and kind of talk that surrounds drawing events. Young children tend to think out loud, in full sentences, as if they were addressing their comments to other listeners. Their companions hear them and respond, and conversations about drawing—the things it depicts and the ways it depicts them—ensue. The conversations that emerge from this self-directive speech may be contentious or supportive, serious or jocular, abbreviated or sustained; but they are a robust feature of early childhood artmaking that emerges clearly when young children draw together in the social settings of classrooms. These are issues that were not as evident—certainly not as urgent—when most children’s earliest art experiences occurred at home, in the presence of a parent or a sibling or two, rather than in the more autonomous realm of early childhood education, where teachers and other children constitute an important segment of the audience for children’s first works.

Research With Children

“Research sometimes ventriloquizes children rather than directly consulting children, using adults as proxy to report on child experience.” (Clark, 2011, p. 6)

Contemporary research focusing on children as makers of images, objects, and meanings begins with the recognition that children exist in specific sociocultural contexts and communities, in circumstances that supply many of the material and interpretive resources at their disposal. This means that we must be aware of what children think and say and do, the ways in which those thoughts and actions are shaped by the culture surrounding them, and the ways in which children themselves produce and exchange cultural capital (Thompson, 2009). Explaining the conditions that constitute research *with* children as something quite distinct from research *on* or *about* children, Greene and Hogan (2005) describe the necessary understanding of childhood that underlies more collaborative perspectives:

Studying children as persons implies a view of children as sentient beings who can act with intention and as agents in their own lives. An interest in researching children’s experience can, therefore, be allied to a moral perspective on the role and status of children which respects and promotes their entitlement to being considered as persons of value and persons with rights. The focus shifts thereby to studying children and not child variables. The child as an experiencing subject is a person whose experience and whose response to that experience are of interest to themselves, to other children, and to adults. (p. 5)

Seeing children as individuals whose experiences occur and matter in the present tense, who are capable of informing us about the things that they do and undergo, who are “rich, strong, and powerful,” in the formulation that Loris Malaguzzi (1994) and his collaborators in the preschools and

infant centers of Reggio Emilia favor, is an essential first step in conducting research with children. We must acknowledge the reciprocity in our interaction with them, the extent of our influence on them, and the agency they exercise when they choose among aspects of the culture that adults design for their use. To recognize even the youngest of children as capable of cultural production and innovation, as discerning consumers and creators, as constructors of knowledge, we can approach them with curiosity seasoned with respect, a conviction that children can teach us what we need to know. As Bill Nye the Science Guy says, every person we meet knows something that we do not: This includes those who are much younger. What children know best, far better than we could hope to, is what it is like to be a child in the 21st century.

Perhaps one of our greatest failings as adults is our unwillingness to recognize that we are “others” to the children in our care; we are the people they rebel against, and ours is the culture they oppose by creating one that purposely draws a line that shuts us out, composed of things we neither enjoy nor endorse nor understand. Although the one thing we inarguably have in common is that we were once children ourselves, we must remember that our own experience is no more than a starting point for understanding contemporary children. As Joe Kincheloe (1998) remarked, “In the context of childhood education, the postmodern experience of being a kid represents a cultural earthquake” (p. 172).

Understanding Children’s Culture, 21st-Century Edition

“If the culture of the teacher is to become part of the consciousness of the child, then the culture of the child must first be in the consciousness of the teacher.” (Gallas, 1994, p. 149)

Children enter classrooms wearing the emblems of their culture on tee shirts and shoes and backpacks, and these characters from popular culture quickly begin to appear in their

stories, drawings, and play, whenever children are invited to choose their own adventures. The cultural references that children exchange are valuable as cultural capital, allowing newcomers to establish themselves as “in the know,” as kindred spirits and people with interesting lives beyond the confines of school. The process begins early.

While we may resent the ideological contamination of Disney movies seeping into our children’s consciousness or the overtly manipulative programming of child-specific television, there is undeniable value in the establishment of a common culture. The very fact that cultural artifacts commercially made for children grates on adult sensibilities is undeniably part of their allure. A long-playing series of images devoted to the meme Killing Justin Bieber emerged among the preadolescent students in Saturday art classes at Penn State several years ago, and endured as a way to declare common cause, to dominate conversation at sketchbook time, to vet new members of the clique, and to cause the adults in the room to cringe.

Images and ideas drawn from popular culture produced for the consumption of children (or appropriated from more mature audiences) serve children in much the same way that other narratives—family stories, fairy tales, oral histories, books, poems, and songs—do. They become part of what Harry Broudy (1994) called “the imagic conceptual store,” an assemblage of resources for making meaning. Marjorie and Brent Wilson (2010) recognize media materials as contemporary versions of the myths of yore, noting that “the world depicted in the media provide a plethora of exciting materials from which to build their own creations” (p. vi). What is different, perhaps, in recent times, is the ubiquity of these materials and the inability of adults to filter and select what children see and hear and respond to in the incessant barrage of sight and sound and movement that they encounter each day. This is in itself a radical change from Lowenfeld’s time: Picking apples and waiting for the bus in the rain may

still be primary experiences for many children living in central Pennsylvania, but these firsthand experiences are now accompanied and surrounded by the experiences of learning Photoshop and researching images on digital devices. And as Wilson and Wilson note, the variety and allure and sheer quantity of mediated messages assures that they will serve children in the way that their experiences always have: "If images from the media are the raw material from which children form their own visions and versions of the world, imagine the vastly greater number of images they encounter today than they did three decades ago" (p. vi).

Imagine this, too, as an issue of class and age, gender, and cultures: Access to popular culture is a social issue of tremendous magnitude in childhood studies, one which is particularly salient to children who are drawing to please themselves, particularly when they do so in the social setting of the classroom.

Third Site Research and Pedagogy: Sketchbooks and Children's Choices

"When drawing is used in a collaborative and communicative manner it becomes a powerful meaning-making tool." (Brooks, 2009, p. 1)

For many years I have championed the use of sketchbooks as a central feature of the art curriculum. Most of the images that accompanied this presentation were made by children enrolled in Saturday art classes at Penn State or in the preschool classrooms of Guadalupe A. Reyes Children and Family Center in Chicago. The undergraduate and graduate certification students who teach Saturday art classes are shamelessly strong-armed into providing 15 minutes at the beginning of each meeting with their students to draw whatever they would like in their sketchbooks. These drawings are voluntary in the sense that Betty Lark-Horovitz, Hilda Lewis, and Marc Luca (1973) described long ago: made on request with materials and time supplied by adults, with the choices of



subject matter, style, and approach left to the discretion of the children. More recently, influenced by my colleague Brent Wilson (2007; Wilson & Wilson, 2010), I have come to recognize that sketchbooks, much like learning centers and other forms of provocation that encourage independent exploration, constitute a "third pedagogical site" or a "third space" (Bhabha, 1994), where the interests and learning of children and adults come together in a particularly productive way. Anne Dyson (1993, p. 24) recommends a "permeable curriculum," where out-of-school experiences and interests of children are welcomed into the classroom, to inform and enrich their understandings of the more formal curriculum and to establish a community of shared interests around personally motivated writing and drawing. The opportunities for adults to learn from children—watching as they work, listening to what they say, and interacting with them—are astounding. There is reciprocity here, and a bit of role reversal, as children provide a master class on the variations of style and the range of interests that develop within any classroom. By the second week of Saturday classes this semester, several of my students complained that the sketchbooks were clearly the children's

favorite part of their classes; they were having a hard time distracting students from their projects in order to teach the curriculum the teachers had planned.

Still more recently, I have recognized other connections to the self-initiated drawing activity that sketchbooks provide. Among these is the compatibility of sketchbooks with the choice-based philosophies of the teachers who have formed the alliance known as Teaching for Artistic Behavior (Douglas & Jaquith, 2009). Those who speak for this movement recognize the truth in David Hawkins' (2002) observation that "Children simply distinguish themselves when they're working at different tasks in different ways" (p. 90). They also realize that the only way for children to experience art in a way that conforms to the practice of working artists is to remove the constraints that complicate and distort art education in the schools, as far as that is possible. Writing of her own work in a preschool in Vancouver, Sylvia Kind (2010) suggests that we consider moving "away from thinking about children's visual processes as individual creative self-expression or the production of a particular product toward thinking about them as processes for investigation, expression, meaning making and communication"

(p. 121). As she notes, this is compatible with the understanding of graphic languages that motivates the exceptional work of children in the preschools of Reggio Emilia in northern Italy, where drawing, painting, construction, and technology are understood and used as languages. Lella Gandini (2005) describes these graphic languages as:

experiences and explorations of life, of the senses, and of meanings. They are expressions of urgency, desires, reassurance, research, hypothesis, readjustments, constructions, and inventions. They follow a logic of exchange, and of sharing. They produce solidarity, communication with oneself, with things, and with others. They offer interpretation and intelligence about the events that place around us. (p. 9)

When children are encouraged to pursue the topics that concern them the most, the subjects of their drawings range widely, and sometimes they veer into territory well beyond the beaten track of school-appropriate subject matter. As Joseph Tobin (1995) points out: Even in situations where such freedom prevails, wise children constantly make decisions about the topics and issues that are appropriate, even safe, to explore in classroom settings. I have come to realize over the years that this editorial facility is not something to regret, as if we are allowed only the most sanitized and superficial glimpses of children's worlds, tantalizing but incomplete views of a deeper, more authentic reality. This is the reality of children's lives—indeed, unsurprisingly, of all of our lives: to live within and alongside various shifting cultural groups and to invest only a part of our personalities in each one (Schutz, 1970). As William Corsaro (2010) points out, “children are always participating in and part of two cultures—children's and adults’—and these cultures are intricately interwoven” (p. 18). The possibility of conducting research *with* children exists because we live with them in this shared third space (Thompson, 2009), a space *between* the worlds of children and adults, where each of us are actively

engaged, in dialogue with one another about the work that is emerging before us. As Kind (2010) reminds us:

Art is not easy, it is not always calm and pretty. It can be messy, disruptive, unsettling. It works with excesses, in the openings and ruptures.... It pushes boundaries and it has the potential to disorder, transform, and bring the unthought and unimagined. (p. 119)

Being There and Becoming Curriculum

“Listening... means giving value to the other; it does not matter whether you agree.” (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 114)

How does this self-initiated and self-directed drawing activity rest within the larger structure of the curriculum? Is it an isolated moment in the day, unrelated to what follows? Or can it be an opportunity to build curriculum that is negotiated between the worlds that teachers know and those that their students find meaningful?

At a very immediate level, the choices children make provide a starting point for curriculum for the teacher who is present and responsive to issues presented in drawings and willing to participate in dialogue with students. The teacher “enlarges the choices that can be made” (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 107): He or she must “be able to widen and extend children's horizons by creating complexity in the child's environment and by introducing new theories, concepts, languages and materials, as tools for children's theorizing and meaning making” (pp. 103-104). This practice has been developed and refined in Reggio Emilia preschools, where projects emerge from multiple sources—including teachers' observations of children's play, the conversations they have, and the choices they make throughout the day—and proceed as sustained inquiries involving many opportunities to explore, share, represent, and revisit ideas and theories in the making. Moving away from the center of the educational process, teachers become participants in children's explorations, offering proposals that may or may not be taken up by the children,

providing resources, asking questions, and provoking puzzlements that lead to new ventures. The roles of teacher and research blur. As Wilson (2008) suggests:

When kids and parents relinquish their usual roles, their usual status as kid or adult, when they share sources and their tastes in art and contemporary visual culture together they have the opportunity of becoming co-equal joint producers of contemporary visual culture. (p. 9)

Still Another Perspective

“Lines of flight are everywhere. They constitute the available means of escape from the forces of repression and stratification. Even the most intense strata are riddled with lines of flight.” (Rojas-Sotelo, n.d)

There are other ways of looking at the process of being there with children and responding to their immediate curiosities and long-term preoccupations in order to create an art education that embraces the 21st-century child. The process of thought that I have described here is certainly not linear, categorical, or complete. It is an unruly rhizome that continues to veer in one direction, and then another, considering children, culture, art, and teaching; what adults know and have to share; and what children bring to the education encounter and what they find there. As Lowenfeld knew, it is our responsibility to teach children in terms that are relevant to the lives they lead. ■

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ENDNOTE

- ¹ A revised version of this story will appear in a forthcoming issue of the *International Review of Qualitative Research*, guest edited by Charles Garoian, and in *New directions in researching young children's artmaking*, a chapter co-authored with Marissa McClure, Christopher Schulte, and Kristine Sunday in the forthcoming, edited by Olivia Saracho. In each case, the incident is interpreted from a different perspective.

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AUTHOR NOTE

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