

# **TACTYC**

Inspiring Practice in Early Education

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## **Supporting Playful Drawing: The Role of the Adult in Early Years Foundation Stage Settings**

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# Overview of Presentation

1. Background to the research project
2. Taking a playful approach to drawing
3. Supporting teachers in an action research training programme
4. Key finding:  
Supporting playful drawing - making drawing accessible to ALL children

## ***Background:***

# **Supporting Young Children's Use of Drawing as a Tool for Thinking and Learning**

- ❑ This project is built upon earlier research reporting the misconceptions early years teachers can hold about drawing
- ❑ These misconceptions influenced practitioners' practice to the detriment of the child's experience.
- ❑ In many of the settings everyday routines and rituals discouraged young children from using drawing as a tool for making meaning  
(Ring, 2003; Anning and Ring, 2004; Ring, 2006),

# Common difficulties for the children included:

- ❑ not having constant access to paper and drawing tools
- ❑ drawing being limited to a small 'mark making' area where the young child was surrounded by letters and formats for writing
- ❑ over-direction from adults in relation to expected outcomes
- ❑ lack of praise and recognition for creativity and originality.

# Adult routines and rituals leading to the perception of drawing as work.

- ❑ The common replacement of the term 'drawing' with 'mark making' had led to an understanding of mark making as merely the precursor to conventional writing for many adults.
- ❑ Drawing, for children who were not regularly choosing to access it as a tool for making meaning (the youngest children, particularly young boys), was associated with 'workful' activity i.e.
  - something adults expected you to do as part of their developmental checklists
  - something difficult to do
  - something that had little meaning for you but a lot of meaning for adults

# Taking a playful approach to drawing

- The research project needed to address the necessity for playful collaboration between children and between children and practitioners
- *Playing with ideas is not just the highest form of intellectual activity, it is also the most fundamental. It is where we all begin: to wonder, to think and to become independent rational beings. (Hope, 2008:17)*

# Taking a playful approach to drawing

- *The need to be playful is essential to human intellectual growth and emotional wellbeing.  
...Whilst being playful human minds use the capabilities developed in childhood to imagine, dream, create, consider and invent new ways of problem solving (Hope, 2008).*

# Taking a playful approach to drawing

- ❑ Playfulness is an important attitude of mind which is dependent upon the internal qualities that children bring to an activity.
- ❑ Playfulness develops over time as a result of experience and interaction and it can continue to influence children's thinking and behaviour throughout their lives.
- ❑ Being playful allows a child to ensure an activity is meaningful to them.
- ❑ Being playful allows a child to cope with their need for personal freedom in spite of the social constraints which form part of interaction with others. (Hope, 2008; Howard, 2002; Parker-Rees, 1999).



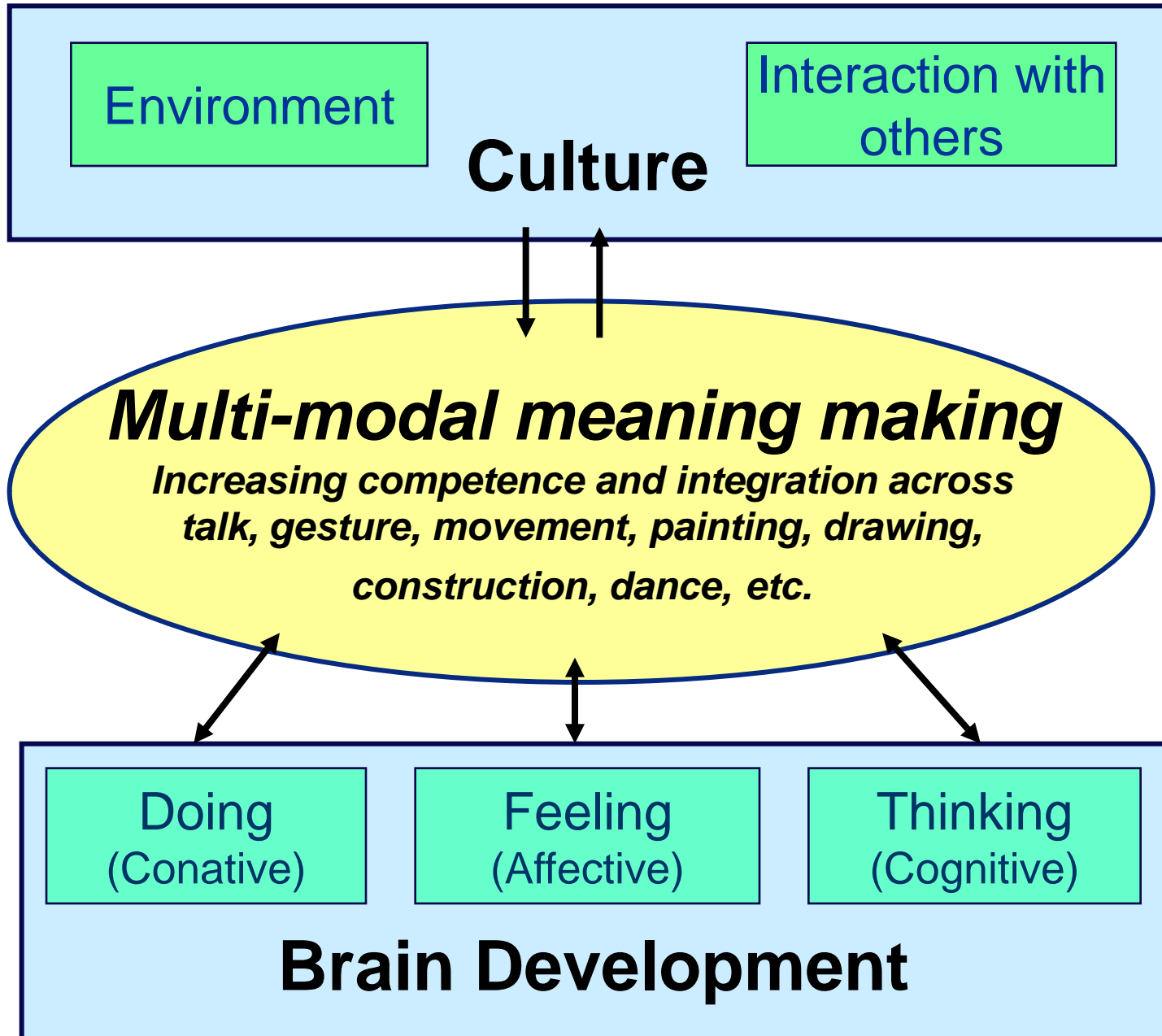
# Taking a playful approach to drawing

Children's drawing is a social and cultural activity, affected by the beliefs of both adults and peers and by the rules, routines and provisioning of the environments in which it takes place

# Taking a playful approach to drawing

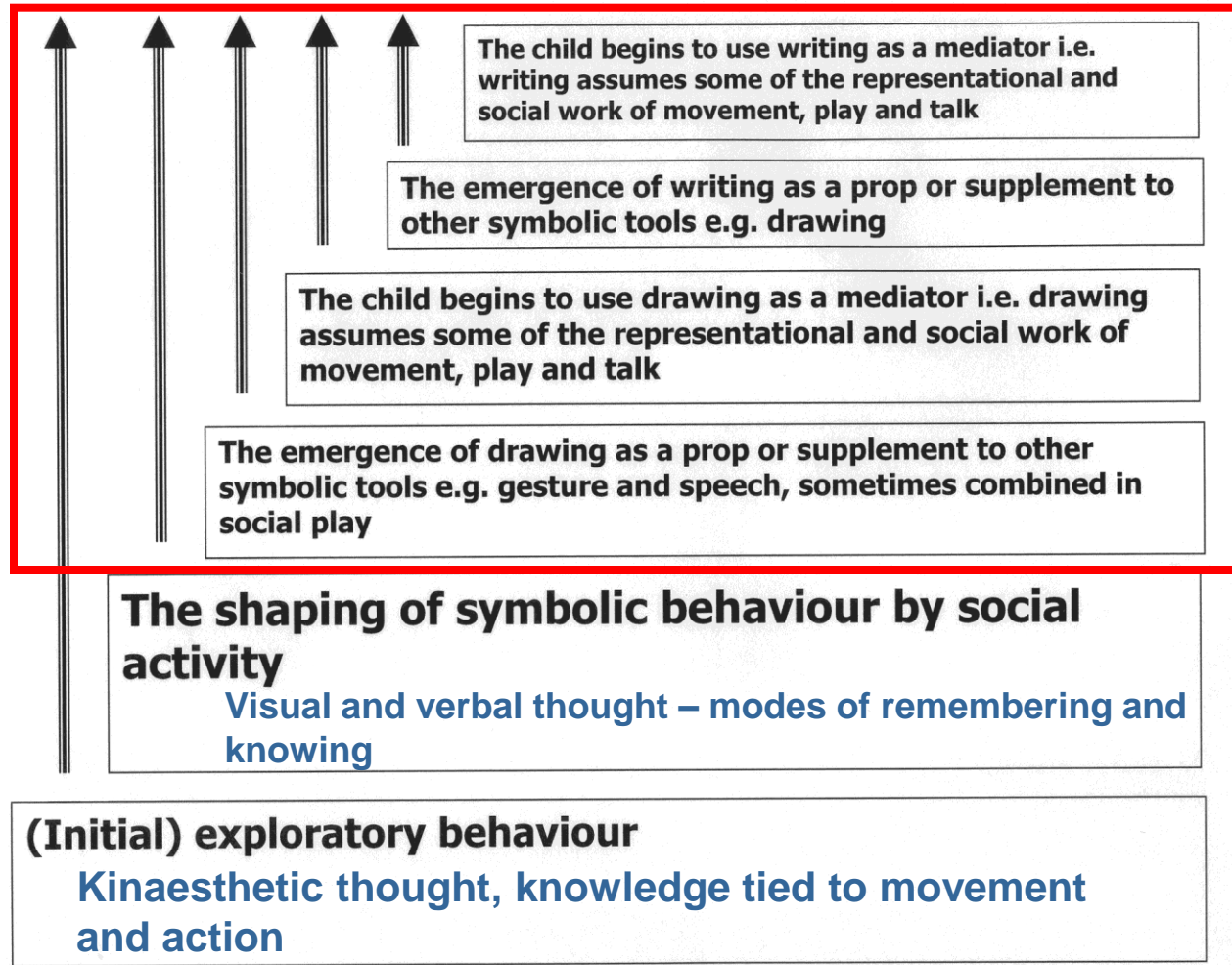
- ❑ Asking young children to draw an adult-prescribed object or person, with adult-prescribed colours and media, on an adult-prescribed coloured, shaped and sized piece of paper – and maybe just a little help from the adult “so that parents can be pleased with it”, leaves little scope for the child’s creativity or expression of meaning.
- ❑ Too often supposedly creative outcomes are held in the mind and eye of the prescribing adult and leave the child looking to the adult for signs of approval in order to know what they have to do to ‘get it right’. The ‘right response’ in adult terms is usually completed hesitantly by the child and lacks the vigour that accompanies a response that has greater significance and meaning.

# The Child Making Sense of The World



# The situated nature of drawing within a continuum of children's use of symbol systems (developed from Dyson, 1993)

APPROX 6  
YEARS



BIRTH

# Scientist describing his use of abstract visualisation

- ❑ *You reduce the number of variables,*
- ❑ *Simplify*
- ❑ *Consider what you hope is the essential part of the situation you are dealing with;*
- ❑ *You apply your analytical techniques.*
- ❑ *In making a visual picture it is possible to choose one which contains representations of only the essential elements –*
- ❑ *A simplified picture, abstracted from a number of other pictures and containing their common elements.*

John-Steiner  
(1997:84)

# The importance of drawing as a tool for thinking and learning

- ❑ Drawing mediates between the outer and inner world of the child
- ❑ It emerges from children's exploratory behaviour where
  - Knowledge is tied to body movement, action and tool use and where there is
  - integration of doing, feeling and thinking
- ❑ As a symbol system it is part of their playful, meaningful and multi-modal engagement with the world

# Drawing as a tool for thinking and learning:

- ❑ helps the young child to symbolise meaning, play with ideas and make new connections
- ❑ supports the child's ability to remember (hold ideas in the mind) and to communicate those ideas with others and with themselves
- ❑ extends and makes visible the inner thought processes of their creator
- ❑ introduces the child to thinking in two dimensions and therefore supports the eventual use of the more abstract symbol system of writing.

# *Supporting teachers in an action research training programme*

## **Research Aims:**

- ❑ To support early years practitioners in understanding and interpreting their role in supporting young children's use of drawing as a tool for making meaning and
- ❑ Uncover the complexities involved in the learning processes of teachers engaged in this process.



# Research Design

- ❑ A three-day course was designed for early years teachers
- ❑ Training and action research were intertwined to address both theoretical understanding and practical activity.
- ❑ Over the last six years,(2004-2010), sixty teachers, (three cohorts of twenty), have undertaken small-scale action research projects which have focussed upon them better supporting drawing in their settings.

- ❑ The research design needed to allow the complexities involved in how practitioners understand and interpret their role in supporting young children's use of drawing to come into view.
- ❑ The intention was to facilitate this by ongoing exchanges of views, between participants and the trainer-researcher.
- ❑ The trainer-researcher's role was that of a sympathetic and critical friend who began by exchanging theoretical knowledge for knowledge of everyday practice but gradually became part of a collaborative team, as theory became embedded in participants' understanding of what they observed.

- The use of participatory action research supported the focus on what the practitioners did, what they meant and what they valued, and the discourses in which they understood and interpreted their world (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005).
- Across the three days of the course, the practitioners, working as a focus group, were facilitated in an ongoing exchange of views about the complexities and contradictions of their beliefs and action in relation to drawing and their connections made with new theoretical understanding from lectures and reading.

# Research Approach

**The programme was formulated around four principles of practice:**

1. To work *with* teachers to help them understand and engage with uncertainty about drawing and their role in supporting drawing. This would include their participation in data collection, interpretation and analysis of findings so that they could increase their impact upon practice.
2. To take an *interpretive* approach, the primary goal being greater understanding of the complexities involved in how teachers develop and interpret their role in supporting young children's drawing in early years settings.

3. To ***foreground visual methods***, for example, collecting digital images, videotape and booklets of annotated drawings alongside narrative in order to provide the teacher-researchers and the trainer/researcher (myself) with context-related images and narratives and rich data for joint-analysis.
4. To take a ***longitudinal*** approach with the initial focus or study group forming the first phase of the project, followed by a second longer phase of in-depth study where the trainer/researcher would be working more closely with a smaller number of interested teachers.

## As recognised by Prosser and Loxley (1998:4) visual methods

‘Slow down observation and encourage deeper and more effective reflection on all things visual and visualisable; and with it enhance our understanding of sensory embodiment and communication, and hence reflect more fully the diversity of human experience.’

## Within the project images were:

- ❑ Produced by the participants and the researcher as data;
- ❑ Used as data or springboards for theorizing;
- ❑ Used to elicit or provoke other data
- ❑ Used for feedback and documentation of the research process
- ❑ Used as a mode of interpretation and/ or representation (Weber, 2008:47).

The research methodology drew upon Reiger's (1996) documentation of social change using systematic visual measurement. It combined repeat digital images of:

- ❑ the same site over time
- ❑ participants in the change process
- ❑ activities, processes and products (including children's engagement with drawing activity, their drawings or digital still images of their drawings).



# Data Collection Methods (3 cohorts of practitioners)

<b>Stage 1</b> 20 participants	Initial and final questionnaires	Completed by individual practitioners as part of the training course and focusing upon their beliefs about drawing and the practices in their settings
	Notes of content of structured discussions in sessions	Completed by practitioners working in groups as part of training course
	Booklets of annotated children's drawings and digital prints of children's drawing in context	Completed by individual participants in own settings, recording evidence of change in practice and change in child drawing behaviours
<b>Stage 2</b> 10 self - selected participants	Digital images accompanied by practitioner and researcher narratives	Collected as the practitioner walked the trainer-researcher through their setting, pointing out evidence of change in provisioning or child behaviours in relation to drawing (described below)
	Semi-structured interviews	Completed by individual participants and trainer-researcher in practitioners' settings. Interviews structured by the annotated drawings and digital prints collected in the booklets and focussed on change in practice and its impact within the setting
<b>Stage 3</b> Self - selected participants	Digital video evidence	Focus upon interaction around drawing activity
	Notes of content of analysis of video	Completed by teacher and researcher Defined sampling criteria used

## *Findings:*

# Supporting playful drawing - Making drawing accessible to all children

## **Initial audit of drawing behaviours within settings:**

Children's disposition to use drawing as a meaning making tool reflected, in many cases, a particular set of culturally determined values.

- ❑ Expectation 1: As children approach formal school age they will make pictorial drawings i.e. figurative drawings showing recognisable objects or people.
- ❑ Expectation 2: Children will be able to talk about their 'pictures' and be prepared to add detail to them in order to improve them i.e. making them fit into adult pre-occupations with realistic representation or acceptable 'school art'.

*‘There are too many distractions that prevent children from developing their drawing skills. Probably only a small proportion of our children actually come to draw on a regular basis – these are usually girls. No-one uses the mark making materials in the art area. We place too much emphasis on writing rather than drawing. We don’t value what the children can already do. We are so intent to move them on to what we think is important i.e. figures and houses, that we don’t capitalise on their interests. This is especially true of boys. Boys rarely come to the mark making table but do seem to like large pieces of paper on the flip chart or felt tips on the whiteboard.’*

## □ Boys

In many of the Foundation Stage settings practitioners were not making provision which supported young boys in accessing drawing as a tool for meaning making.

A common response from the teacher-researchers was that

*“young boys don’t choose to draw”* and

*“they prefer to be outside or be working in 3D”*.

# John Matthews

Helping Children to Draw and Paint in Early Childhood (2002)

Drawing and Painting: Children and Visual Representation (2003)

Gives examples of children constructing meaning by re-presenting physical, affective and cognitive action in a visual form

- ❑ ***Figurative representation*** – suggesting the shape of an object
- ❑ ***Action representation*** – the movement of the brush represents the action of the object/ person in time and space (e.g. a round and round movement with the brush representing the movement of the wheels of a car)

- Boys were more likely to be adult directed in order to fit in with adult thinking. Dominated by others' needs for 'people drawing' these boys perceived drawing as 'workful' rather than playful

- ❑ Girls generally seemed to be accessing drawing because:
  - their generally greater physical maturity and fine motor control enabled them to gain pleasure from drawing on a small-scale, seated at a table
  - they associated drawing with being in role as ‘grown-up’ and a ‘school girl’
  - they enjoyed socialising as a small group, using ‘draw and talk’ to weave together visual and verbal narratives which largely concentrated upon past and future activities of family and friends

In contrast with boys, girls were meeting adult expectations of figurative drawing and therefore had no need of adult support and intervention. There was little incentive for them to move beyond a limited repertoire of ideas.

*‘A large whiteboard and pens have been provided outside to accommodate those who choose to spend most of their time outside and doing physical activity, particularly boys. This is in addition to a mark making table undercover which has chairs and leads to more individual and considered work. The whiteboard has the attraction of being quick to use and accessible from bikes. Many of the drawings show speed and movement reflecting the physical activity and are completed quickly and are not often referred to again.’*



# Stage 1 Findings:

## ❑ **Arrangement of space**

Large space indoors and out, use of floor, use of wall

## ❑ **Provision of materials**

Large scale paper and markers

Need for materials which promote 'flow'

Constant provision, plentiful and well organised

## ❑ **Interaction with children who are drawing**

Adult understanding of drawing as a learning tool

Moving away from adult directing or 'editing' the child's meaning

Awareness of power relations

Problems of asking children to talk about what they are doing  
e.g. should child be asked to explain whilst creating and is the expectation that drawings always easily transfer into words valid?

Quality of relationship adult has with child

*You know, you do need to see the children and know the children and to have followed their interest to really engage and to understand their drawing. The child who we saw drawing at the table, he's so imaginative. He doesn't draw one thing. It's all interconnected and his ideas are just racing.*

*Well it's important not to stop that flow. He uses things like the role-play areas and props and he'll use construction and develop his stories and ideas through those and outside as well. But the main thing he tends to go for will be the drawing.*  
(F2 Teacher)

*In the child-initiated activities they've got the freedom to move to different areas and make links and develop their thinking. They might go from a role-play area into mark making or construction or whatever it is and continue that play in a different way.*

(F1&2 Teacher)

*As child-centred planning evolves, observation, reflection and focus on the 'next steps' has become key – planning has become more flexible, responsive and 'open' to children's choices and use of resources, which in turn has opened up opportunities for children's creativity and for adults to develop a role as 'collaborators' in play and learning.*

(F1 Teacher)

*I used to put limits on where children could take things. They had to keep certain things in certain areas but now I seem to have relaxed this. The children can keep their play theme going for much longer now because they can move from area to area taking things with them.*

(F1 Teacher)

*At the heart of our philosophy and practice are wellbeing and involvement, and practitioners working alongside children in reflective co-construction of meaning. This has led us to be more open, less restrictive and increasingly aware of the need for sensitive, subtle and respectful interaction.*

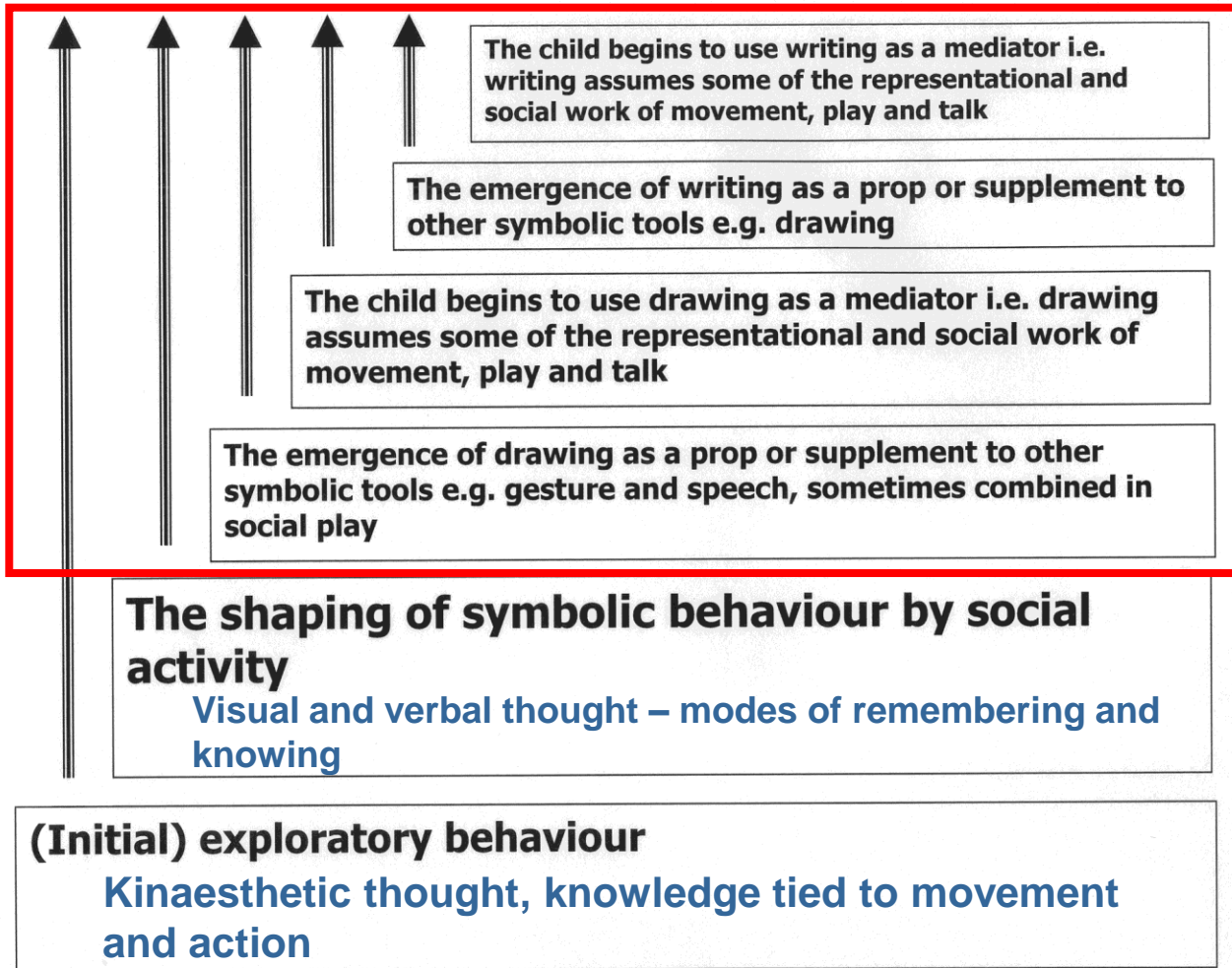
(F1 Teacher)

## *To take forward:*

# Drawing: A first order symbol system

- ❑ Vygotsky (1978) considers drawing, like play, to be a ***first-order symbol system*** directly denoting objects and actions
- ❑ Writing, is a ***second-order symbol system*** and stands for the spoken symbols for objects or action  
It is one of the most complex mental activities which human's learn to perform
- ❑ Dyson (1982) draws attention to ***the development of writing from drawing***, certainly from the children's perspective – the connection with language coming after.

**APPROX 6  
YEARS**



**BIRTH**

**For the youngest children, particularly boys, drawing opportunities are squashed into an inappropriate time-scale by imposed writing requirements**



# Transformation and transduction

- ❑ Continuous provision supported transformative action
  - 'orderly change within one mode' (Kress, 2008).
- ❑ A growing strength of the teachers' work was their growing ability to listen (with all their senses) to what the child or groups of children were expressing and communicating, not just through their drawings but through what Rinaldi (2005) terms their 'hundred languages'.
- ❑ For Kress this movement across modes supports transduction
  - 'the drawing across from one mode to another' and was seen to lead to profound changes in meaning and in patterns of thinking and behaviour.

# Importance of:

- ❑ Importance of time/ space/ materials/ adults who support appropriately
- ❑ Children having modes of expression modelled by experienced peers (rather than adults)
- ❑ Children becoming fluent/ expert / saturated in a chosen mode of expression
- ❑ Having exhausted the possibilities of one mode, children freely moving onto another mode of expression or 'language'

## Wells: Child directed activity

The most successful learning interactions were achieved by teachers when they responded to their children by negotiation and by developing the child's own interests.

*'... What is most important in the behaviour of the child's parents and other caretakers is sensitivity to his current state – his level of communicative ability and his immediate interests – and to the meaning intentions he is endeavouring to communicate; also a desire to help and encourage him to participate in the interaction.'*  
(1985:33)

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# Stage 1 Findings:

Arrangement of space	Provision of materials	Interaction with children who are drawing
<p><b>Importance of:</b></p> <p>Provision of drawing space indoors and outdoors</p> <p>Children having ownership - therefore freedom to move/ combine materials</p> <p>Comfort – e.g. cushions, something to rest paper on</p> <p>Large area of floor to accommodate children’s access to larger pieces of paper – A1/ A2</p> <p>Resources being readily to hand where there is somewhere physical to be</p> <p>Resources not neatly sorted on shelves – too distant</p> <p>Space to display – blu-tack so that children can display own drawings</p> <p>Balance between tidiness and mess</p> <p>Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can too many things be over facing?</li> <li>• Do children need fewer things easily to hand rather than neatly stored in one area?</li> <li>• Is this dependent on age and/ or experience?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Importance of:</b></p> <p>Constant provision of materials</p> <p>Paper of various sizes/ shapes/ types/ quality/ colour</p> <p>Size of paper - large paper leads to greater involvement, more collaboration –need big markers, pencils, charcoal/ pastels to make large, bold marks easily</p> <p>Drawing tools – pencils, crayons/ pencil crayons, felt tips – including metallic and florescent, chalks, pastels – wet and dry</p> <p>Clip boards and pencil attached - A3 and A4</p> <p>Having more clip boards available outside as it impacts upon boys mark making</p> <p>Whiteboards and dry markers, board cleaners -</p> <p>Sticky tape, scissors, string, glue sticks – used particularly by sophisticated mark makers (reception class) for cutting out, tearing, folding, sticking and joining before mark making</p>	<p><b>Importance of:</b></p> <p>Adult understanding drawing's significance for the child as a 'child appropriate' tool for learning – not merely one of a range of art activities or 'colouring in'</p> <p>Modelling of drawing activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children needing to see 'how to do it' – should adults draw when children are drawing? (Huge area of debate – problems with child thinking this is the 'correct' way of drawing)</li> <li>• Positive impact of four-year olds modelling drawing behaviours in nursery settings</li> </ul> <p>Recognising the power of adult(s) and therefore difficulty of role - e.g. How to know when and how to become involved - the child may not want to talk about drawing especially while drawing; Not interpreting and giving own meaning Being interested but sensitive Being non-threatening, giving time, not interrupting, watching with interest (being aware however that this could be intimidating)</p> <p>Recognising that asking a child to name a drawing can be putting pressure on a child because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• they are not drawing a 'thing'</li> <li>• they are in the process of making a decision</li> <li>• they know they will be asked and therefore cannot decide what to draw</li> <li>• they are drawing for an audience</li> </ul> <p>Adult seeing the process the child has gone through and therefore having greater understanding</p> <p>Knowing the child i.e. their interests and preoccupations</p> <p>The relationship the adult has with the child</p>