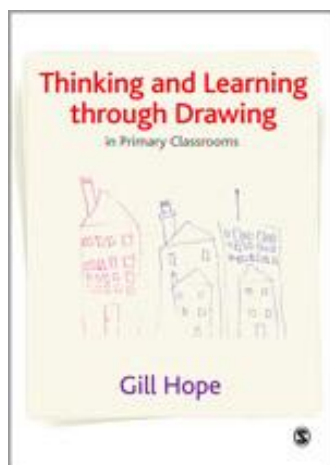


Book Review



Thinking and Learning through Drawing in Primary Classrooms

by Gill Hope

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Review by **Tereza Markidou**

Thinking and Learning through Drawing in Primary Classrooms is a well-written and wide-ranging book, which provides a holistic and comprehensive account of the multifaceted educational value of the *process of drawing* by exploring its various roles and possibilities across the curriculum. Based on the societal context of contemporary UK primary education, and moving beyond narrow-minded and static views and approaches, Hope manages to interweave recent theory and research around drawing with teachers' practice and children's actions. Furthermore, she explains why drawing is considered as an imperative to the development of children's observational skills, expression, creative and imaginative thinking, meaning-making and socio-cultural interaction. As stated in the introduction, this book's paramount idea is "that all children's drawing in every dimension has this dual role: to carry their ideas on a journey of exploration that enables them to learn to think about a myriad of new possibilities in every direction" (p 9).

The book consists of six clearly defined, yet not strictly sequential or distinct, dimensions. The principle that underpins all dimensions is "the way new concepts are built from previous ideas" (p 6). In that respect, the whole book consists of a multi-dimensional application of the Container / Journey metaphor, a model developed by the author and influenced by the work of Lakoff and Johnson (1980). With an enthusiastic, yet evaluative, voice the author suggests a logically progressive order between the dimensions she proposes. Thus, she begins with accentuating the significance of playful drawing experience, which is described as the milestone that triggers the child's development of perceptive, emotive, cognitive and meta-cognitive skills. Depicting on manifold aspects from the developmental and social-constructivist theories of learning, Hope provides arguments for the biological, social and cultural significance of drawing as a process for the human being.

The first dimension, entitled 'Drawing to play', stresses the vital role of early explorations, discovery and experimentation with different media from a very young age. Engaging with playful drawing activities leads children to make meaningful marks, as well as to realise and interact with their milieu. The knowledge of how to play with media - techniques as well as with ideas - are essential preconditions for 'possibility thinking', a concept introduced by Craft (2000). Moving to 'Drawing to mean', the writer discusses how meaning is expressed and communicated via drawing and writing, as well as through the combination of these two, laying emphasis upon their function as semiotic and symbolic acts. At this point, a consideration of the analytical, metaphorical and metonymic nature of drawing is accomplished. The third dimension reveals the affective and emotional contribution of drawing to the development of the child's inner personality and imagination and its communication to the outer world. Hence, 'Drawing to feel' designates the importance of the

sensual appeal, offered by the use of drawing media, together with the children's involvement in creative, non-linguistic endeavours, such as patterning, music and poetry. All these activities can be equally satisfying and self-fulfilling. Empathy, humour and spirituality are some additional issues explored in relation to the act of drawing within this part.

The fourth dimension, 'Drawing to see', contains more than the title suggests. Hope critically examines the significant misconception of many teachers, who align drawing and painting solely with the production of realistically lifelike portraits or locational representations. She explains that drawing moves beyond the production of canonical shapes and culturally framed observations. Teachers must embrace children's need to experience with as many representational genres as possible. As she points out, seeing is about understanding and about making connections with the world around us, which are then conveyed through drawing. 'Drawing to know' concentrates on the inter-curricular possibilities of drawing by celebrating its most basic and multifunctional uses in other disciplines, such as mathematics and geography. The argument here is that drawing enables children to transform conceptual problems into apt and tangible visual forms, which are then able to be shared with others. Sketching a simple line diagram to materialise the abstract mathematical ideas, or exploring forms and space / place relations through geometry and cartography / map-making are merely a couple of such visual applications. Finally, 'Drawing to design' encapsulates the use of drawing for invention and innovation. In order to accomplish finding true innovative solutions, deep understanding and a sense of reflection on "how things work" are considered vital. That been said, drawing provides a space where this understanding can be explored, expanded and transformed. The author concludes by describing how the Container / Journey metaphor enhanced the use of "drawing as a tool to design thinking" (p 13) in a Year 2 Design and Technology class.

This book is a good companion to be used alongside the art curriculum in promoting children's visual and graphic literacy. It is certainly in line with the UK Government initiatives (ie, Excellent and Enjoyment initiative, Creative Partnerships) and privately funded art campaigns (ie, Power Drawing), aiming to build up on the profile of drawing and to inspire children to engage with any kind of constructive drawing activities (Burkitt, Jolley and Rose, 2010). By carefully using key references from the field of art education, the discussion in most parts has an internal flow due to the use of comprehensive language in describing crucial and controversial concepts, such as learning and creativity. However, I would say that, in some parts (ie, 'Drawing to play' and 'Drawing to know') the arguments become more generic and over-simplified in order to become understandable. Furthermore, although the interlinking between theory and practice is done in rather a systematic way inside each dimension, I consider that sometimes the practical guidelines surpass the theoretical grounding, creating a sense of disorientation and distraction to the reader. Yet, Hope does manage to offer the opportunity to her audience to draw links and imagine further possibilities by reflecting on their own practice. This is what I recognise as the main strength of the book: the conscious effort to connect theoretical concepts with general classroom practice, thus coalescing the gap that is often identified or, even, ossified amongst the two fields.

Reading this book from multiple viewpoints, both as a primary teacher with specialisation in the creative arts and as a PhD candidate in the field of art education, I consider that I was engaged with it more as a teacher than as a researcher. Consequently, I believe that this highly accessible, uncluttered and informative book will be valuable to teachers (art specialist or general teacher), student teachers, teaching assistants and anyone who is eager to develop an initial insight regarding the complex and inter-curricular use of drawing. In short, the author succeeds in her intention to lead the reader through the variety of possibilities of drawing: as a tool for enhancing thought, communication, creativity and social and cultural engagement.

References

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