

Studying meaning in children's drawings

Marit Holm Hopperstad

Queen Maud University College of Early Childhood Education,
Norway

Abstract

This paper reports on an ethnographic study conducted with two Year 1 classes in two different Norwegian schools. In total, 35 five- and six-year-old children were involved in the study and were observed over a two-month period as they engaged in learning activities that involved drawing. Building on Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) theory of a visual 'grammar', this study draws attention to the ways that visual features in drawings made by the children in their first year in school can be found to carry ideational, interpersonal and textual meaning. This paper discusses the similarities and variations in the types of meaning the children make and the interests that seem to have motivated the children. It argues that a focus on drawing can help practitioners support and promote children's visual literacy, and suggests pedagogical implications in light of the study. To begin, the research topic is related to a definition of literacy that encompasses multiple semiotic systems.

Keywords

drawing, visual literacy, meaning-making

Introduction

Eisner (1997, p. 353) defines literacy as a way of conveying meaning 'through and recovering meaning from the form of representation in which it appears', suggesting that different forms of representation and communication demand a distinctive form of literacy. Texts today often include images and other graphic arrangements, demonstrating the value of a visual literacy or the ability to make meaning of and with visual forms and structures (Arizpe and Styles, 2003). As a consequence, the literacy education children receive in school should include visual texts as well as verbal language (Anning and Ring, 2004; Kist, 2000; Kress, 2003; Luke and Elkins, 1998).

Corresponding author:

Marit Holm Hopperstad, Queen Maud University College of Early Childhood Education, Th. Owesens gt. 18, N-7044, Norway

Email: mah@dmmh.no

Children bring with them a range of skills for visual meaning-making as they enter school (Anning and Ring, 2004). It is my assumption that these skills need to be seen and that they represent a valuable starting point and resource for the educational task of supporting and promoting the children's visual literacy. To contribute to pedagogical practice, I explore how meaning is conveyed in drawings made by five- to six-year-old children in two Norwegian school settings during their first school year. The children responded to drawing invitations presented by their teacher as part of pre-planned learning activities. Theoretically, I benefit from the work of Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996). These researchers have provided an analytical framework within which to 'read' and discuss visual meaning, encouraging us to consider the ideational, interpersonal and textual meaning in children's drawings.

My aim is to contribute to knowledge of drawing as meaning-making. I also hope to encourage teachers to pay attention to children's ways of constructing meaning with drawings and consider the value drawing has for visual literacy education.

Drawing is found to work as a bridge from the semiotic mode of the image to print and writing (Dyson, 1989). Recently, researchers have taken an interest in children's drawings as an alternative means of representing and communicating knowledge and understandings. This research has also demonstrated the multimodal quality of children's drawing practices (Anning and Ring, 2004; Coates and Coates, 2006; Hopperstad, 2008a, 2008b; Kendrick and McKay, 2004; Pahl, 1999). Pantaleo (2005) and Rabey (2003) have analysed children's drawing responses to picture books, showing their skills to make meaning both of and with visual resources. These studies all suggest that children's drawings convey meaning and help children articulate ideas and understandings in ways verbal language may not offer. My contribution is to apply the framework of Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) to analyse meaning in the drawings of five- to six-year-old children and to consider the pedagogical potential that drawing may offer for supporting and promoting children's visual literacy skills.

Theory

Inspired by Halliday's (1994) theory, Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) have developed a visual 'grammar' to analyse the visually specific ways images realise three fundamental types of meaning. First, there is the *ideational meaning*, or what an image represents or 'says' about a given phenomenon. The authors

make a distinction between narrative, analytical and classificational visual structures (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 43 ff.). Second, Kress and Van Leeuwen ask about the interpersonal meaning of an image, or the way it addresses its potential viewers or audience. Here, they make a distinction between images in which depicted persons appear to be looking directly at us and images lacking this direct gaze. The first category 'demands' interaction while the latter is an interpersonal 'offer' (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 119 ff.). Third, the authors consider the ways images make textual meaning, or work as compositions. They describe such visual features as framing to make distinctions between elements, relative size and uses of colour (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 181 ff.). I build on Kress and Van Leeuwen's analytical concepts to study the content of drawings children make in teacher-planned sessions, the ways the drawings appear to engage us as viewers and how they can be 'read' as complex statements.

Kress (1997) argues that drawing, like any other meaning-making activity, is a motivated process through which children orientate intentionally towards the world. When studying the children's drawings, I have asked about the interest behind the meaning they convey. Any drawing is the result of its maker's active and creative response towards their experiences. Yet, we also have to consider children's growing control over visual resources and their feeling of confidence in the situation (Pahl, 1999; Thibault, 1997), and pay attention to the multimodality of their meaning-making practices (Dyson, 1989; Pahl, 1999).

A drawing affords experiences to be recorded, yet as a still picture, any drawing will inevitably 'arrest' the rapidly changing features of the world as we perceive it (Gibson, 1986). Kress (2003) argues that the visual mode is more suited to 'showing' what the world consists of rather than 'telling' about movements and actions. He suggests that multimodal meaning-making helps children overcome this limitation. Many of the drawings in my study are inspired by narrative texts, making this point particularly relevant to attend to.

Method

My study included 35 five- and six-year-old children attending two Year 1 classes (A and B) at two different schools. Class A consisted of 22 children and two teachers. Class B included 13 children, one teacher and one teacher assistant. The study was conducted within an ethnographic perspective (Green and Bloome, 1997). That is, I investigated over time a specific aspect of the children's school day: learning activities that included drawing.

The ethnographic approach allowed me to be a participant observer, experiencing the context that surrounded the drawings and the talk and body actions that accompanied the drawing process. This very much aided my understanding.

I visited each class for a period of two months. During the first week, I spent as much time as I could among the children to get to know them and make them feel confident about me. As the study progressed and observations started, I often experienced that the children turned to me to talk about their drawings or any other topic that interested them. I regarded this as an indication of my acceptance.

In both classes, when working, the children were organised in groups of four, or sometimes five or six. I selected one of these groups as a focal group for each of my observations. I used a stationary video camera with remote control to document the drawing process. To help the children feel confident about the equipment, I answered any questions they had about the camera and allowed them to study it whenever they wanted to (Erickson, 1992).

My focus was on teacher-initiated activities involving drawing. I categorised the drawing sessions I observed according to their sources of inspiration:

1. *Drawing inspired by texts*: In both classes read-aloud sessions were followed by drawing sessions. The texts included Norwegian folk tales, stories by Hans Christian Andersen (Class B only) and Bible stories (Class B only). In Class A, the collaborative creation of poems was followed by drawing sessions.
2. *Drawing inspired by topics*: In Class A, the children made drawings relating to the topics 'the rainforest' and 'trolls and other scary things'. The children in Class B moved into a new school building during my visit and the teacher included 'our school' as a topic for drawing to help the children express their thoughts about their new environment.
3. *Drawing inspired by experiences outside school*: Data collection in Class B was conducted during the winter and spring terms. The teacher invited the children to talk about and make drawings inspired by their winter break experiences. In a later session, the children were invited to make a drawing to share their Easter holiday experiences.

The drawing tasks were broadly formulated, for instance: 'Now I want you to draw something from the story you have been listening to'. The children were provided with white A4 paper, crayons and colour pencils and some

used tools from their own pencil cases. In one session the children were offered felt-tip pens in silver and gold.

The teachers and assistant would walk among the children and sit down occasionally to talk about the developing drawings. In both classes, the teacher talked to each child about the finished drawing, occasionally encouraging a child to do more work on it. The children were routinely instructed to put their name on the finished drawing.

As the researcher, I sat close to the group being observed, paying attention to what the children were doing and saying, taking care not to interrupt them in the process. However, I happily responded whenever they turned to me to ask a question or describe their drawings. Often, more extended conversations would then develop, which in turn proved valuable for my analysis. Thus, my degree of participation in talk varied according to the situation and the children's initiatives (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973).

A total of 63 drawings were collected. In addition, the study material included a few drawings that the children were not satisfied with and threw away before starting all over again. The finished drawings were scanned onto a computer after each drawing session. All the video observations were transcribed.

Results

In the process of analysing how meaning is conveyed in the drawings, I studied the drawings as well as the related transcriptions of the drawing process. This strategy helped me get a fuller understanding of the types of meaning in the material.

In the following sections, I present the types of meaning and their realisations that I have observed. Throughout, I make references to Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) concepts for the analysis of visual meaning. I also include examples to illustrate the findings. All names are pseudonyms. A blank field is inserted in some texts to hide signatures.

Ideational meaning in the drawings

When studying how the visual features convey ideational meaning, I found that some drawings can be related to Kress and Van Leeuwen's description of analytical visual representations, while others parallel the narrative, visual structures they describe (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 56 ff.). I have developed the categories *analytical drawings* and *narrative drawings* to discuss

these findings. In addition, I found that some of the children have combined semiotic resources to make multimodal representations.

Analytical drawings

The first drawing presented is a typical example of what I call an analytical drawing. Made by Thomas, it was inspired by the Norwegian folk tale *The Little Boys Who Met the Trolls in the Hedal Woods* (Figure 1), in which the little boys get lost in the woods and have to fight against the trolls. In the drawing we see (from left to right) a tree, a troll, a boy, a bush and three stones. In terms of the visual grammar, Thomas seems to have drawn the attributes that the folk tale is the carrier of – or the essential objects and actors the story ‘has’ or consists of (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996). The objects and actors are arranged according to size. Visually, the result is a very ordered drawing that allows each element to stand out. Additionally fascinating is Thomas’s detailed representation – or analysis – of the troll. Again, we see that he has attended to the essential features of these creatures or the typical attributes that trolls have: trees on the noses and lots of moss on their bodies. No doubt Thomas has taken inspiration from other troll images. That he enjoyed making his detailed troll analysis became clear to me while observing the process. While drawing and colouring in, Thomas repeatedly whispered to himself ‘moss moss moss’ (in Norwegian ‘mose mose mose’).

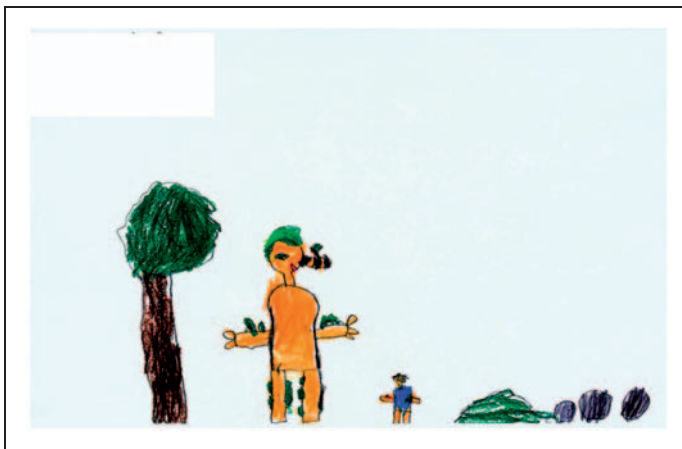


Figure 1. Thomas’s drawing.

Next is Ane's drawing related to the topic 'My Easter holiday' (Figure 2), which is another example of an analytical drawing. The drawing shows her new pair of shoes, which she made a point of describing as 'high-heeled'. Ane seems to have analysed the 'high-heel-ness' of the shoes. Using side view, she has effectively represented the form of the heels and the relationship between heel and toe. Her drawing communicates the basic structure that high-heeled shoes have – or the attributes that distinguish them from other kinds of shoes. The drawing also carries meaning about the decisions and challenges involved in the drawing process, as Ormerod and Ivanič (2002) discuss. As we can see, Ane made four shoe versions before she was pleased with the result, scribbling over the first three.

Guro's drawing (Figure 3) represents the main actors in the Norwegian folk tale *Sir Per*. Per is a poor boy that sets out to find happiness. With the help of



Figure 2. Ane's drawing.

a cat he defeats the troll, gets access to its impressive castle and treasures, and becomes even richer than the king. In return, the cat, which is a bewitched princess, demands that Per cuts its head off to break the spell. The written caption in Guro's drawing reads 'Sir Per and the king' and the drawing identifies its major actors. From right to left we see the cat (before its head is cut off and the spell is broken), Sir Per with an axe in one hand, the princess (free of the spell) and the king. The king is identified by the crown on his head, a conventional symbol found in folk tale illustrations and other visual media. A more remarkable element is the large pink heart drawn in the upper section. During the drawing process the children discussed whether Sir Per and the princess would marry. Guro was certain that they did and the purple heart immediately brings the 'happy ending' to mind for those who are familiar with the folk tale genre. Here, love is so to speak 'in the air'. Closer scrutiny also reveals tiny, red hearts all over the princess's dress.

Unique among the analytical drawings was one made by Ivar, inspired by a collaboratively written poem about a horse, a pig, a jumping flea and a sheep. Ivar decided to draw the jumping flea. His drawing is a creative analysis of the stages of a flea jump, from the ground, up in the air and down again. Lines, which can be seen as the kind of time line that Kress and Van



Figure 3. Guro's drawing.

Leeuwen (1996, p. 95 ff.) describe, connect one flea drawn in the lower left section of the paper to a second made in the upper mid-section and a third in the lower right section of the paper. Looking at his finished drawing, Ivar verbally put his visual meaning into words, saying, 'There – the flea jumped'.

Narrative drawings

The major resource to realise narrative meaning in images is the visual vector, which may be a diagonal line, an arrow or other elements we associate with direction (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 40). In my study, I found that the children used such vectors as diagonally formed lines on which depicted persons were placed. They drew persons, animals or other animates in tilted positions or in profile with arms, legs and noses pointing out to signify movement and direction.

Georg made a drawing inspired by the folk tale *The Ashlad Who Stole the Troll's Silvery Ducks* (Figure 4). The Ashlad is feeding breadcrumbs to the ducks in an attempt to steal them. Georg has drawn the pond with the ducks all delicately coloured with a silver felt-tip pen. The Ashlad is standing to the right of the pond, feeding the ducks. His outstretched, bent arms and tilted body position form a strong vector, telling us that he is in the act of throwing breadcrumbs to the ducks – the ducks being, in the terms of Kress and Van Leeuwen,



Figure 4. Georg's drawing.

pointed out as the goal for his action. In other words, Georg has represented his narrative meaning as a transaction between the Ashlad and the birds (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996, pp. 61–2). Each duck is drawn in profile and with wide-open beaks pointing towards the breadcrumbs. Obviously, they are heading for the food.

Next is Mari's winter break-inspired drawing (Figure 5). She has drawn herself and her sister as they roller skate down a steep hill outside their house, smiling brightly as they go. The diagonally formed line that goes across the paper and the careful placement of the girls on this line tells us that an action is taking place.

Multimodal representations

A few of the children activated the *multimodal representations* that are observed in other studies of children's meaning-making (Anning and Ring, 2004; Coates and Coates, 2006; Dyson, 1989; Kendrick and McKay, 2004; Pahl, 1999). Guro's written caption in Figure 3 is one example and Ane used writing to label some of the elements in her drawn response to the folk tale *The Ashlad Who Had an Eating Contest with the Troll* (Figure 6). The drawing shows the troll, the Ashlad, Ashlad's rucksack, the troll's treasure casket and the pan of



Figure 5. Mari's drawing.

porridge, all central actors and objects in this particular folk tale. Written captions identify the treasure ('skat'), the Ashlad ('Askeladen'), the pan ('grytin') and the troll ('trål'). In this case, the drawing extends the texts, providing more information than the written words (Pantaleo, 2005). The 'treasure' is for instance visually represented as consisting of a ring, a diamond and a necklace, all neatly coloured. Ane may have regarded these items as examples of the types of treasures that were in the casket.

A few children included the balloon form known from comic strips in their drawings to represent the speech or thoughts of drawn persons (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 76). For example, in her poem-related drawing, Nina included a balloon to make a man say, 'Ooooh, this stupid microphone does not work'.

Some children in my study, mostly boys, combined drawing, talk and gestures to represent movements. In a drawing session inspired by a poem in which a racing car was a main ingredient, Roar, Steffen and Thomas went from drawing individual versions of the car to talking about technical finesses and then to signifying the speed and sound of the car with high-pitched voices and bodily movements (Hopperstad, 2005). As Kress (1997) suggests, this multimodal strategy allows children to 'enter' the drawings, making the representation of movements more 'real'. Related to my study, the

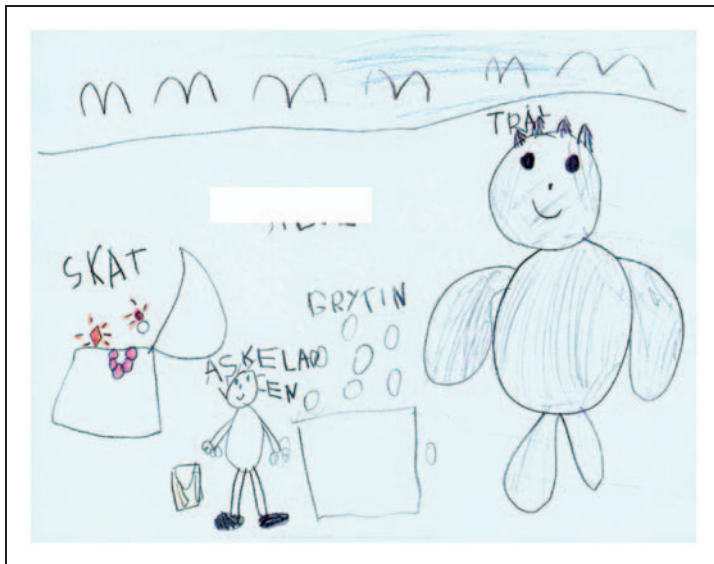


Figure 6. Ane's drawing.

combinations of drawing, talk and gestures enhanced the children's engagement with the dynamic dimension in the texts, topics and experiences they were invited to make drawings of.

Interpersonal meaning in the drawings

I asked how the drawings appear to address potential viewers and influence our engagement with the content of the drawings. Based on Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996), I have observed that some drawings are 'demanding' interaction while others are 'offering' interaction. I also found drawings where the uses of angle seem to convey interpersonal meaning.

Drawings 'demanding' interaction. Often, the children drew the persons, animals or other animates in frontal view, causing the drawn characters to look directly at us, so to speak. In most cases they also smile. I can relate this observation to Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996, p. 121 ff.) description of images that 'demand' interaction and engagement from us. In turn, the direct gaze has an impact on the way we come to engage with the content. In Figure 6, the direct gazes from the troll and the Ashlad demand that we pay attention to and recognise them as the major actors in the folk tale, as Ane perhaps also did when making her analytical drawing.

Figure 7 is Vidar's drawing inspired by the folk tale Sir Per. Vidar has drawn Sir Per about to cut the head off the cat. Per's tilted body and arm with the axe work as a vector for the action. Despite the drama involved, Per and the cat look directly at us and smile. That this was intended by Vidar became clear when he described his drawing to the other children. When asked why the cat smiled, having her head cut off, he replied, 'She knows she is going to become a princess again, of course she must smile'. Vidar's drawing encourages us to share this happy prospect.

Some children differentiated the facial expressions of the persons depicted. In Guro's drawing (Figure 3), the contrast between the rather grim face of the king and the bright smiles of Sir Per and the princess calls on a close but differentiated attention to their destiny.

Drawings 'offering' interaction. In many of the narrative drawings, the depicted persons are shown in profile or from behind. These drawings relate to us in a more open way, offering us the possibility to reflect on the phenomenon that is represented, parallel to Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996, p. 121 ff.) description of interaction as an 'offer'.



Figure 7. Vidar's drawing.

Vera's drawing inspired by her winter break experience (Figure 8) shows Vera and her sister, mother and father sitting at a table in a restaurant, all drawn with their back towards the viewer. Drawing persons at a table was perhaps demanding for Vera, making this a safe choice. However, the act of sitting on chairs around a table was perhaps more important to her than facial details. Vera's accompanying description during the drawing process – 'We are sitting on chairs' – supports this latter interpretation. A potential viewer is similarly positioned as an onlooker and offered the same possibility to reflect.

In several drawings the children varied the use of the frontal and profile form. Eline's drawing (Figure 9) was inspired by the same folk tale as Thomas (Figure 1). Eline has represented the moment when the trolls approach the two little boys, seen to the right in the drawing. Ideationally, the profile form tells us that the trolls are on their way towards the boys. Interpersonally it works as an 'offer', inviting us to contemplate their action. The boys' frontal position however, demands that we pay attention to the drama they are involved in.

In a few drawings the use of angle appears to carry specific, interpersonal meaning. An example is Jon's drawing of a castle, again inspired by the folk tale *Sir Per*. Jon's drawing is one of very few in which the letter format of the paper is used. The castle is drawn in frontal view, filling almost the whole page. The door, coloured yellow to signify gold, is drawn relatively small, which adds the effect of a low angle to the drawing. Taken together, the castle



Figure 8. Vera's drawing.



Figure 9. Eline's drawing.

appears to hover above us, dark and powerful. As viewers we can consider its status and proportions as perhaps Jon also did when making his drawing. In support for my interpretation, I can refer to observations of Jon talking with the teacher about the proportions of the castle.

Textual meaning in the drawings

A number of visual features have helped the children to compose visual texts. Following Kress and Van Leeuwen's framework (1996, p. 181 ff.), I describe the following realisations of textual meaning in the material: (1) framing of drawn elements, (2) signals of salience and (3) reading paths.

Framing of drawn elements. Some children used graphic lines to frame elements. Ane's drawing (Figure 6) is an example. In the upper part of the drawing is a horizontal line, above which are six birds. Ane explained to me that the troll, the Ashlad and all the other things below the line are 'inside the troll's cave' and that the birds above the line are 'outside the cave'. The line works as a frame, connecting that which is part of the folk tale and disconnecting these elements from those that are not (the birds). In Figure 2, Ane used a circular form to frame the final version of the high-heeled shoes and disconnect this from her early sketches.

A few children used empty space to disconnect the elements they drew. In Figure 1, empty space above separates the tree, the troll, the boy, the bush and rocks, supporting the analytical representation that appeared to be at the heart of Thomas's drawing engagement. As a composition, the drawing invites us to carefully scrutinise each element.

Signals of salience. In some drawings, the use of colour signals the importance or salience of a specific element (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 212 ff.). The detailed and delicate colour of the silvery ducks in Georg's drawing (Figure 4), Thomas's representation of the troll (Figure 1) and the coloured treasures in Ane's drawing (Figure 6) are examples. Colour makes these elements 'stand out' in the drawing as a composition, immediately catching our attention.

In accordance with Kress (1997), I have observed that some children place certain elements higher up on the page to indicate that some things are in the background, behind other elements which are drawn further down on the page, causing the effect of them being in the foreground and overlapping the less salient elements (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 212). Figure 10 shows Mari's drawing inspired by the Hans Christian Andersen story *The Little Match Seller*. Mari informed her peers at the table that the girl was 'sitting dead in front of a house' and that she was smiling because she 'dreamed of her grandmother'. The girl is drawn in the lower section of the paper, partly overlapping the house and causing the impression that she is in front of it. Even though the



Figure 10. Mari's drawing.

girl is quite small, her position attracts our attention and makes her the salient element, standing out from the rest of the drawing. The colours of the girl's clothes, her bright hair and facial details add to this effect.

In some drawings *size* seems to have been used to signal the elements' relative importance. The pond, for example, is the larger element in Georg's drawing (Figure 4). In addition to its strong symbolic value, the size of the heart in Figure 3 may also be seen as a signal of salience and an element we are encouraged to pay particular attention to.

Reading paths. Some drawings (e.g. Figures 5 and 9) are arranged according to the left–right pattern of written texts, demonstrating their orientation to this fundamental cultural convention. In others, I observe a more non-linear way of organising the elements. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996, p. 203 ff.) suggest that the placement of an element in the *centre* of an image makes it more important in the composition than elements placed in the *margins*. Figure 11 shows Daniel's drawing, again inspired by *The Little Match Seller*. The dead girl, tadpole-like in form, is drawn in the centre, a few lines on the girl's head representing her hair. The placement of the other persons

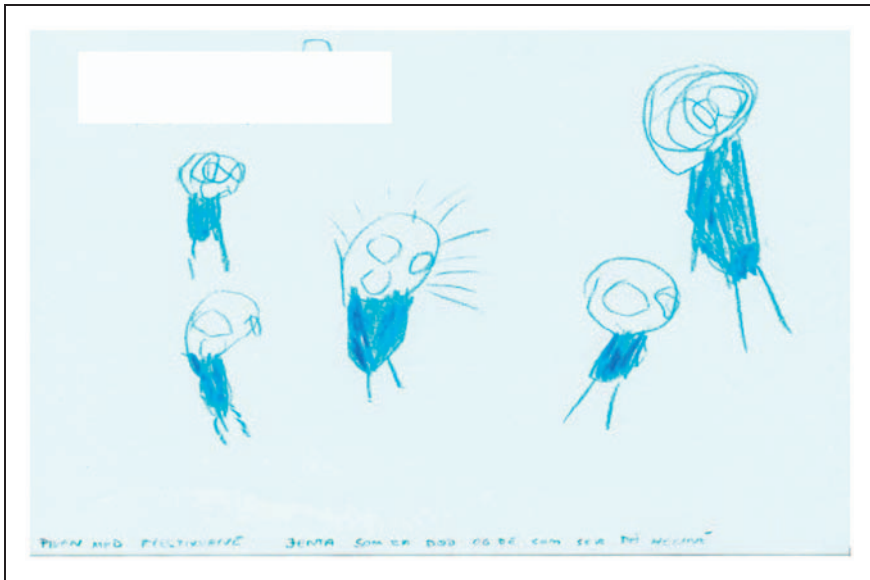


Figure 11. Daniel's drawing.

evokes a feeling that she is surrounded by onlookers. That this was intended by Daniel became clear when he instructed his teacher to include the written text: 'The dead girl and the people who are looking at her'.

Discussion

The children in my study made drawings inspired by texts, topics and experiences outside school. The analysis shows that a range of ideational, interpersonal and textual resources convey meaning. In my analysis I benefited from contextual data. Listening to and talking with the children gave me a fuller understanding of their visual agenda. However, as not all the children engaged in talk during the drawing processes, a combination of observation and interviews may have been helpful.

Comparing the drawings, I found similarities in the types of meaning that were made and their realisations. The use of space and line framings to make distinctions between drawn elements is, for instance, found in several of the analytical drawings across groups, classes and sessions, indicating the children's attention towards the drawings as compositions. When the children represented narrative meaning, they relied on resources such as diagonal lines, the profile form and outstretched arms to show direction, these features constituting visual vectors. The similarities indicate the children's common

access to meaning-making structures and forms and their skills in using them for various purposes. The children may also have picked up ideas from each other when sitting together to draw. The intimate situation at the table gave rich possibilities to look at each other's drawings and copy visual-graphic solutions. Pahl (1999) finds that children often copy each other in the things they do and make. Ideas tend to spread among children working together. It is relevant to refer to Kress (1997) here, who argues that children never 'merely copy'. Meaning-making is always a transformative process and copying is also 'new making' (Kress, 1997, p. 37). Even if the children in my study have copied other children's drawings, each drawing is a unique context for the visual forms and structures that are copied.

I also found variations in the drawings, showing that the children had different intentions when responding to drawing tasks in school. Guro and Vidar (Figures 3 and 7) and Thomas and Eline (Figure 1 and 9), for instance, constructed different meanings about the same folk tales. Some meanings were unique, such as Ivar's representation of the stages of the flea jump and Guro's use of the heart symbol (Figure 3).

Anning and Ring (2004) point at the importance of 'tuning into' the uses to which children put drawing in order to fully understand their visual representations. Encouraged by their point of view, I will apply Kress's (1997, 2003) notion of meaning-making interests to further discuss the types of meaning I have observed. To understand how children make meaning with drawings we need to search for the interests that drive them, as these, according to Kress (1997, p. 19), are always reflected in the drawing. I suggest that the children in my study seem to have been driven by: (1) an interest in facts, (2) an interest in events and (3) an aesthetic interest.

1. *An interest in facts:* Parallel to Rabey's (2003) study, many of the children favoured the representation of objects and persons that were central to the texts, topic or home experiences. In these cases, the children seemed to have been driven by an interest in facts, resulting in drawings that have an overall ordered quality and very few setting details, so that each element – or fact – can easily be scrutinised (e.g. Figures 1, 2, 3, 6 and 8). Drawing is, according to Kress (1997, 2003), particularly suited to 'showing' what the world consists of, a quality that children soon come to experience. Kress's point makes it relevant to assume a dynamic interplay between the interest in facts and qualities inherent in the visual mode.
2. *An interest in events:* Throughout the data I found drawings that reflect an interest in events – in the dynamic dimension of the world. The roller skating drawing

(Figure 5) and the drawing of the Ashlad feeding the ducks (Figure 4) are examples. Some drawings are about the dramatic quality of the events, when the cat is about to lose its head (Figure 7) or when the trolls are approaching the little boys (Figure 9). In other drawings, the children have attended to emotional aspects (Figure 3).

3. An *aesthetic interest*: An aesthetic interest also seems to have motivated the children, reflected, in particular, in the use of colour. The delicately coloured pond and ducks (Figure 4) and the carefully coloured little red hearts on the princess's dress (Figure 3) are examples. The aesthetic interest cut across interest in facts and events, demonstrating the artistic pleasure children may take from visual meaning-making.

My description of the meaning-making interests is based on the analysis of both drawings and observational data. In all acts of meaning-making, the meaning-makers will be influenced by a web of interests, many of which will be difficult or impossible to track (Kress, 1997, 2003). Making a drawing takes time. Aspects of the situation, such as talk and playful interaction (Hopperstad, 2008a) and experiences from drawing outside school (Anning and Ring, 2004), may influence the children when they decide what and how to draw. The interests I describe are therefore not exhaustive. Also, they should not be interpreted as static and distinct for each drawing. Making a drawing takes time and different interests may occur as the drawing develops. Guro (Figure 3) started her drawing on the folk tale *Sir Per* by ordering its essential objects and actors, demonstrating an interest in facts. Inspired by the happy-ending discussion, she included the large pink heart that, besides adding an emotional dimension to her drawing, also indicates an aesthetic interest. A child's drawing may contain a complexity of meanings and reflect shifting interests that are only available to us through close observation of the drawing and the process surrounding it (Pahl, 1999).

Thibault (1997) suggests that children's growing control over visual resources should also be considered. A child's interest towards a given phenomenon may be more complex than the child is able to render visually. Even if a visual vector is not found in many drawings in my study, this is not to say that the children who made them were uninterested in the dynamic dimension of the given texts, but that a lack of control regarding how to signify action influenced their decisions of what to draw.

The children in my study worked in small groups, in which other children could easily take a look, comment and ask questions. I observed both positive

and critical remarks among the children and occasionally a critical remark would make a child give up the drawing and start all over again (Hopperstad, 2008b). For these children, the presence of peers may have caused a feeling of being unsafe. Pahl (1999) suggests that children need to feel safe to fully engage in drawing. How teachers can help children to feel safe enough to follow their meaning-making interests and drawing preferences is a relevant issue for future research on visual meaning-making in school.

The drawings I have analysed were made in teacher-initiated sessions, making it relevant to assume that material from drawing activities outside school may have given a different result. The sources of inspiration were defined by the teachers. The drawing instructions, however, were rather open ended ('Now I want you to draw something'). For some children this may have been helpful, encouraging them to pursue personal agendas and interests. Others may have felt insecure as to what to focus on and decided on drawings they assumed the teacher would expect and approve of (Anning and Ring, 2004). In addition, the sources of inspiration may have been more or less intriguing to different children. In one session, for instance, responses to a drawing task ranged from a cheerful 'yoo-hoo' to a more solemn 'oh no'. My data is not sufficient to say anything specific about this and further research should be conducted to learn how the presentation of drawing tasks and the sources of inspiration can be found to influence the meaning-making children activate in school.

Conclusion

My study demonstrates a distinctive form of literacy among the five- to six-year-olds: the ability to convey meaning through a range of visual resources and sometimes in combination with other modes. The results contribute to our knowledge about the visual literacy children bring with them to school. Anning and Ring (2004) argue that children entering school are too often made to believe that drawing is a temporary mode. Yet, students need to feel confident in using the 'grammar' of a variety of semiotic modes – the visual being one of them. In conclusion, I will reflect on educational implications in light of my study. Here, my focus is on a pedagogical practice in which children's own drawings are central to support and promote their visual literacy skills.

First, the children need to be encouraged to make meaning with drawing. In my study, the teachers included drawing in pre-planned activities concerning various texts, topics and experiences outside school. Practitioners need to

consider the sources that may encourage visual meaning-making in the child groups they work with. Drawing should also be available as a free-choice activity as this may activate other parts of the children's visual literacy to the teacher-initiated sessions (Coates, 2002). A few of the children in my study developed multimodal drawing processes, combining drawing and writing (Figures 3 and 6) and drawing, talking and gesturing. To make the children more aware of the meaning-making potentials of different modes, including the visual, teachers may encourage combinations and invite the children to reflect on how and for what purposes the different modes are useful for them.

Second, I suggest that teachers can support and promote children's visual literacy by 'reading' and talking about the meaning that drawings convey. Guided by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996), I have presented the ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings the children in my study developed. This analytical frame of reference is helpful, providing a language within which to understand and talk about meaning in drawings. The children in my study often took the opportunity to engage adults in drawing-related talk. Invitations like these provide an opportunity for teachers to emphasise the meaning-making power of the children's similar, varied and unique visual-graphic solutions. This approach may well enhance the children's confidence in their own drawing style and support peer-learning processes (Hopperstad, 2005).

Third, there is a need to value and welcome the children's various meaning-making interests. I have described an interest in facts, an interest in events and an aesthetic interest. Other groups of children may develop and take care of other meaning-making interests, depending on the sources of inspiration behind the drawings. The things children find interesting will often, as Pahl (1999) comments, differ from our adult perspective, demonstrating the value of being open minded and sensitive towards each child's meaning-making issues. I have benefited from observations and close access to the drawing process. Teachers in schools may benefit from a similar approach.

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