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Young children's meaning-making through drawing and 'telling'

Analogies to filmic textual features

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YOUNG CHILDREN'S MEANING-MAKING is a multifaceted, complex experience, where thought, body and emotion unite. Rich and intricate creations are brought to life through children's formation, communication and interpretation of 'signs' which stand for or represent something else. The term drawing-telling is used to describe children's use of a range of signs when depicting imaginary worlds on paper, on the topic of what they think the future might be like. Such depictions include an expansive range of signs—narration, gesture, graphic depiction, onomatopoeia—often used in highly interactive ways.

This paper illustrates, through examples of young children's drawings and transcripts of their 'tellings', the intertextual nature of their work. It foregrounds how adults must be sensitive to children's shifts between various subject positionings and the multiple functions that may be assigned to their depicted objects and events. Similarities between drawing-telling and filmic textual features are featured to assist adults in understanding children's meaning-making.

Introduction

We seem as a species to be driven by a desire to make meanings: above all, we are surely homo significans—meaning-makers. (Chandler, 2002, p. 17)

YOUNG CHILDREN ARE meaning-makers *par excellence*. They use many signs to create meaning and to represent reality within the medium of drawing-telling. Their artistic communication involves a combination of both verbal and non-verbal texts, such as artworks which incorporate narration, music that has lyrics, or dance which includes expressive vocalisation. So, in a broad sense, such texts are an 'assemblage of signs' (Chandler, 2002, p. 3).

In children's drawing, for example, the assembled signs can include graphically produced images (e.g. people, objects), which might also include written letters or words, numbers, symbols (e.g. flags) and graphic devices (e.g. 'whoosh' lines behind a car). In addition, this graphic content may be accompanied by children's sounds (e.g. expressive vocalisation) and imitative gestures to enhance the meaning. Hence, when children draw, they construct and interpret a range of verbal and non-verbal signs with reference to the conventions associated with this medium of communication.

Yet children appear to unconsciously and quite naturally

violate the conventions of the medium of drawing-telling, and the results are frequently delightful. Perhaps this is related to children's proclivity to cross channels of communication. They rely on communication which is bodily based, iconic, basic and expressive. In this sense, artistic communication is the literacy *par excellence* of the early years of child development. It often occurs prior to the acquisition of the skills of reading and writing and, indeed, it underpins, assists and enhances these later-attained forms of literacy. This is evidenced by the sophisticated and abstract levels of understanding and expression that occur through young children's drawings and other forms of artistic expression.

The affordances of the medium of drawing, combined with the medium of telling, allow each of these symbolic domains to enrich and inform the other (Kendrick & McKay, 2004; Thompson, 1995; Wright, 2003a, 2005). Yet the laws that govern the articulation of meaning in the arts are different from the laws of syntax that govern language. Meaning-making in art can be either verbal or non-verbal, or both, because it involves a wide range of representational texts that can be communicated in diverse ways. These artistic texts are depicted and interpreted specially, involving complex and abstract connections between 'signs'. As a result, children are

liberated through art to invent worlds in other-worldly ways, in a similar way to that of adult artists.

Drawing-telling gives children the opportunity to create and share meaning using two modes, which embrace distinctive features in the following ways:

(a) *non-verbal*: graphic depiction (stemming from imagery and visual-spatial memory); bodily-kinaesthetic communication through enaction and expressive gesture (stemming from motor memory)

(b) *verbal*: telling the drawing (talking about the drawing's characters, objects, events, sequencings, graphic details or other relevant characteristics, which often includes onomatopoeia [i.e. the use of a word or vocal imitation of the thing or action designated]).

Such crossover of modes increases children's capacity to use many forms of representational thinking and to mentally manipulate and organise images, ideas and feelings. As Cox (2005) describes it:

talk and drawing interact with each other as parallel and mutually transformative processes. Sometimes the talk feeds into the drawing with the verbalized intention being transformed into drawing. Sometimes the drawing feeds into talk; the drawing intention is transformed into talk. Sometimes these processes are apparently concurrent. (p. 123)

The children's creative processes and representational practices are actualised through the open-ended resources offered through drawing. A blank page and coloured pens can become anything. Consequently, the medium of drawing-telling provides infinite possibilities, rather than 'a pre-determined set of options' (Harris, 1996, p. xi).

Our understanding of children's meaning-making within open-ended frameworks helps us become sensitive to children's 'processes of production' and to their 'authorial intentions' (Chandler, 2002, p. 210). Such receptiveness unleashes our awareness of **how** things are being represented by the children, rather than only **what** is represented (Eisner, 2002; Hodge & Kress, 1988). As Eisner (2002) reminds us:

How something is said is part and parcel of what is said. The message is in the form-content relationship, a relationship that is most vivid in the arts.

Hence, observing children drawing requires an empathy with them, and a sensitivity to their artistic processes in relation to the demands of the medium. As Forman (1994) reminds us, each medium has inherent constraints and affordances which influence children's thinking, processes and outcomes. The medium of drawing, for instance, requires thinking in terms of the visual qualities offered through mark-making using

paper and pencil (or pen, crayon or other drawing tools on other drawing surfaces).

When children interact with the drawing medium, there is reciprocity between the child and the materials (Kolbe, 2000). As observers, we need to be conscious that drawings can serve various purposes and functions; we must try to understand the young artist's goals in relation to these. For instance, the purpose of a drawing may be to represent a bird, or perhaps the flight path of a bird; a mark may function as showing a likeness of a bird, a person, an object, a letter, a number, a movement, a sound or a range of other meanings. Therefore we need to look for both the 'reason' and the 'meaning' of the child's work (Scruton, 1996) (e.g. how the child's various marks may be distinguished and ascribed particular meaning).

To do so, we must be receptive to the child's drawing processes—what he or she is trying to do. This does not mean attending to just the graphic strategies and skills the child uses when drawing, or the resulting end-product. Instead, focus should be upon the processes of the activity—the independent and interfaced components of the graphic, narrative and embodied dimensions of the child's experience. These dimensions should also include the context in which the drawing occurred, and other aspects that may be linked to the drawing: social activities, personal experiences or intertextual influences such as TV, films, comic books or computer games.

Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that, whether the adult is simply observing or actively engaging with the child during the drawing process, the very presence of an adult serves as a form of facilitation. The observer can protract (or perhaps even thwart) the process. Consequently, dialogue between adult and child must be sensitively considered.

Dialogue must be aligned with an awareness of the cross-channel communication of children's drawing, and how children learn not only how to differentiate and consolidate the separate meanings of various forms of symbolising, but also to see connections between them (Dyson, 1986, 1992). Indeed, some preschool children confuse the terms 'draw' and 'write' or use these terms interchangeably, which would suggest that they do not differentiate between the meaning-making potential of these two symbol systems, as illustrated in the following comment by a preschool boy:

This [the act of drawing] is how I write. Just how big adults draw [write]. You should see the legs I'm going to write [draw].

When preschool children want to write their names or the titles of their works, they may describe the process of writing as drawing, as illustrated in the comments of two girls:

- *And I'll write my name on it. I'll draw [write] it up here [top of page]*
- *How do you draw [write the words] 'Not the Future'?*

Such descriptions of their symbolic processes, as they unfold, give a temporal quality to children's acts of meaning. What's more, their graphic intentions often are announced in advance, which implies, 'OK, are you watching now? Here I go.' Hence, the act of, say, 'building [drawing] a house', becomes a visual telling of a foretold event—like a silent narration.

In addition, children often integrate their graphic-verbal tellings of events, objects or characters with:

- **touching the page** (e.g. to feature objects, locate content or to affectionately 'identify' with a character, such as stroke the figure's hair)
- **gesture** (e.g. to enact an event, imitate something to enhance the telling, or 'move' an object or character across the page)
- **onomatopoeia** (i.e. sound effects or vocal imitations of things or actions).

As Siegel (1995) points out, when connections are invented between visual-spatial, auditory and bodily-kinaesthetic channels such as this, the content of one sign system is mapped onto the expression plane of another. During cross-channel communication, children effortlessly weave between many forms of symbolising and select what and how they want to represent something. In other words, they choose the system which is most effective for a particular form of communication at a particular time (Kendrick & McKay, 2004; Short, Kauffman & Kahn, 2000). In the process, they shift fluidly between texts and simultaneously use many systems of signs, such as words, images, sounds and gestures. This is known as intratextuality.

Intratextuality

Intratextuality involves relations within the text. For example, to clarify or enhance the content of an activity, a child's drawing might include labelled items/events, thought/word bubbles attached to characters, or 'whoosh' lines behind a vehicle/character to represent movement. In such cases, the drawing is similar to a newspaper photograph with a caption, a cartoon comic, a narrated film or an ad. Barthes (1977, 38ff) and Bolter (1991, pp. 195-196) discussed how symbols, such as graphics with labels, can help to 'anchor' the text within a medium, similar to how equipment installation instructions, for instance, might have drawings with captions to clarify assemblage sequences.

So what we may choose to regard as discrete text can, in fact, lack clear-cut boundaries. Children's drawings-tellings are abundant with examples of intratextuality, where the visual text becomes anchored through symbols such as the

child's written name, the labelling of specific content, or the use of speech bubbles or 'whoosh' lines. Each of these is illustrated below.

Naming and labelling

For young children, the signs of drawn figures and written letters are often given equal aesthetic and symbolic importance. For instance, in one preschool boy's (5.4 [five years, four months]) work, which included representations of himself, his parents and his dog, the lettering for his name (Liam) is as prominent as the human and animal figures. The significance of his use of both symbol systems is emphasised in his telling of the content.

Image 1.



I want to write my name and this [these figures] here ... I'm writing an 'A' first, and then a 'I L'. Oh, I've done the wrong thing. L I A A ... there.

Some children feature their names using large lettering and multiple colours, placing these in focal positions on the page. The colourful, decorative qualities of the lettering can give the words prominence and equivalent symbolic status to the graphic content. Particularly for children who are just learning to write, or have done so relatively recently, both the drawn images and the written letters have comparable meaning-making significance.

In the example below, the decorative letters provide aesthetic appeal, and there is a sense of balance between the 'M' in Megan's (6.3) name and the shape and position of the cloud in the rainforest underneath.

Image 2.



The interplay between images and words is also foregrounded when children label figures and objects, as illustrated in the example below by a preschool boy (5.3). The words 'cat' and 'dog' are written beside the two larger profile-oriented animals.

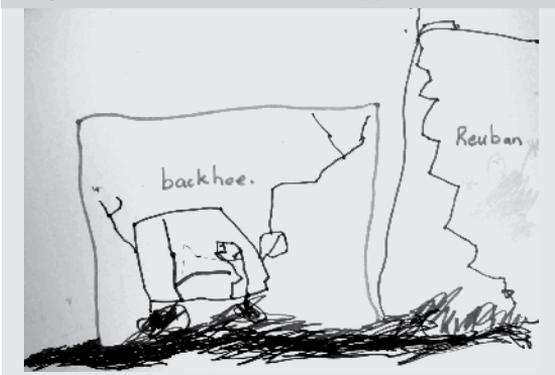
Image 3.



And I can write 'cats' and 'dog' and 'Mop' and 'Mill'. I can write any kind of word. I can't write every word, just some words.

In a further example (below), the name Reuban is added in close proximity to figures to stand for the artist himself. Reuban (5.2) asked an adult to write his name and the word 'backhoe'. 'Backhoe' served both as a label for the object and a description of the event (i.e. 'doing backhoeing'), which is reflected in a segment of a dialogue between the child and an adult ['A' stands for the adult's comments, and 'C' for the child's]. Reuban had an 'Aha!' moment when he looked at both words and saw the connection between the letters in the word **backhoe** and in his name **Reuban**.

Image 4. Reuban the Backhoe Digger



C: Put my name there ['Reuban', far right].

A: [The adult obliges.] Well, that's your name, but what is the picture going to be called?

C: Well I'm **telling** you what I mean. I want to put the name of what I am **doing** [seems annoyed] ... of what the things are. Now put 'backhoe' just here [points].

[Notes the writing of 'backhoe']. Huh! Backhoe's got one of the bits of my name in it [the letters 'ba'].

In summary, children often use letters to add their names to their work or to label particular content within their drawings. These techniques serve to anchor the text and to foreground a preferred reading of the visual content. Similarly, speech bubbles and 'whoosh' lines provide anchorage in relation to characters' spoken language and objects' or characters' movement within the drawing-telling.

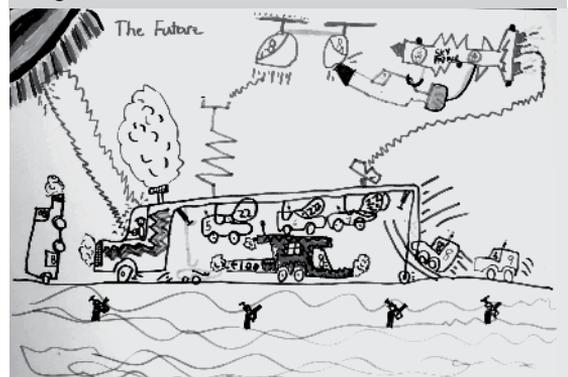
Speech bubbles and 'whoosh' lines

Many children use 'whoosh lines', often accompanied by gesture, to represent movement. In the example below (eight-year-old boy), the 'overall rhetorical orchestration' (Chandler, 2002, p. 202) of the work comes alive through:

- the lines behind the jet and the cars, above the opening back door of the truck, below the helicopter and between the plane and helicopter
- the word bubbles (i.e. 'zzz') above the snoring drivers in the suspended cars.

Through such devices, the lines animate the frozen images of the still, 2D format, and the word bubbles 'audiate' the silent action. They 'articulate' (Metz, 1974, p. 242) with the objects, characters and events to bring the artworks 'alive'.

Image 5.



A: Here's a big semi, is it?

C: Yeah. And some carrying cars, in case you're tired ... you just get hooked up by it and have a rest.

A: They have numbers on them, do they? Oh no, they're not numbers. They just look like number twos from here. They're snoring, are they? Oh [laughs] they're the people in there snoring. Right, so they're resting.

C: Yeah.

The *animation/audiation* of the artwork is similar to the interaction of film with soundtrack. It collectively

contributes to the vibrant nature of the drawing-telling, and reveals relationships and patterns that contribute to the generation of meaning. The multiple codes interact in a complementary way and cannot be considered in isolation. Such integration is what makes these works dynamic enactments.

Dynamic enactment

Children use terms such as 'do' to suggest a real-time event in the making—a live enactment unfolding on paper. For instance, Joel (6.4) said, 'and I've still got to *do* the person' [who is chasing the dog who is chasing the pig]. (See below.)



C: That's a pig. And it ... they're trying to catch the pig because it keeps on hurting people.



The word 'do' suggests a form of personal participation, as if Joel were roleplaying the event, being the character running after the dog and pig—'doing' the person running. Through such doing, objects, characters and events become constructed, and layers of content and relationships emerge—a representational message is 'brought to life' on the page. Hence, the graphic representations of events are not static messages.

Indeed, there are many implicit interactions (object-

object, object-people and people-people) that are meant to be understood as being dynamic events. This is illustrated in two details from the drawing below of a sequence of events depicting a car crash on a futuristic planet. Michael (8.5) presented this as if he were narrating and storyboarding a sci-fi film. He used several words to describe the energetic involvement of cars and other objects, which are emphasised in the transcript.



C: And this is a roadway now. The road is like a tunnel type of thing.

A: A tunnel type thing. Is part of it underground?

C: Yeah, what it is is a tunnel so the cars can just go **through** the tunnel. They got [inaudible] cars that **hover** above the ground about eight centimetres ... All the cars they run ... what do they **run on**? ... Grass. [Adds green 'whoosh' lines behind the cars.] Most of the people have to go to Earth to get the grass. Petrol stations, but they call them grass stations ... Well it's **up in space** I suppose there is no gravity there.

Image 10.



C: [Adds a purple vertical line between the two cars and another between the 'Gravity Machine' and the 'Fish' spaceship.] Some of the stuff on the picture, like human stuff just flying around, had a crash. And got **muddled** up. 'Cause it's outside [orbit] ... That's [car on the right] purple in the inside. It used to be powered on grass but now it is powered on **down** because it's so heavy ... The cars are small but so heavy it's not funny. Not even with no gravity.

A: That one's going to crash, is it?

C: Yup, it is going **down, down, down, down** ... That's what happened there. They [tunnel guard rails] are supposed to be **up** like that [gestures] but they are **down** like that [gestures] ... And here is the other car that **made that one happen** [to spiral out of orbit].

As the examples illustrate, the children were actively *within* the experience. Similarly, the reader becomes a participant in a sense, seeing and hearing the unfolding of events, almost as if sitting at the feet of a storyteller or, more accurately, a narrator-animator. It is as if being systematically placed inside the child's 'frame of experience' (McLuhan & Fiore, 1967, p. 53).

Because of the fluidity of the child's involvement, at times it is difficult to distinguish between what I call the *child-as-subject* and the *child-as-spectator*, or between the *child-as-creator* and the *child-as-created*. Indeed, the child's very participation in the drawing-telling 'plays a part in the constitution of the subject' (Chandler, 2002, p. 91), similar to how one identifies with characters in a film or novel. As author-artist, the child simultaneously participates inside and outside the creative experience, which is reflected in the form of the accompanying narration.

Narration and polyvocality

Children's forms of participation in drawing-telling often shift between two different subject positions:

- enacting the character and event from *inside* the experience (through *first-person* narration), as in 'Reuban the Backhoe Digger' or 'Joel the Policeman'

- describing it from *outside* the experience (through *third-person* narration, such as in a documentary), as in 'Michael the Sci-Fi Storyboarder'.

This shifting between being depicted (embodying or enacting the character) and being the depicter (impartially drawing-telling the event) is revealed within a single sentence in the following example of a girl's (5.7) description of a policewoman capturing a criminal (italicised words are used for emphasis):

Image 11.



A gun, and I'm gonna ... and *she's* gonna grab the gun off him.

As reflected in this sentence, the artist was simultaneously enacting and 'graphic-ing' the role of policewoman (i.e. the drawing of the handcuff touching the 'bad guy's' gun became the enactment of the event on paper, similar to dramatic play). Then, as if recognising the dilemma about being both depicter and depicted, she shifted from *subject* to *spectator* by moving from identifying with the policewoman role (*I'm gonna*) to telling the event as an impersonal third-person narration (*She's gonna*).

As in this example, many children are conscious of how drawing-telling allows them to suspend disbelief—they accept the premise that their drawings-stories are works of fiction and are comfortable playing with this illusion. Hence, they can feel at liberty to alter the framework of their depictions and to change the characters and shift their identification with characters to suit their purpose. They can take on the roles of one or all of these characters, and alter these roles at will in relation to the evolving events of the drawing-telling (Wright, 2005, in press). (For further details of the context of the research related to children's drawings 'of what the future will be like', presented in this paper, and the methodology used, refer to Wright [in press] and Wright [2005].)

In some ways, such moving-in-and-out of identifying with particular characters contains qualities not too

dissimilar to that of *polyvocality*, where first-person commentary shifts from person to person within a text (Chandler, 2002, p. 189). Although there is only one person authoring the text, the child's simultaneous *depiction of* and *description of* people, objects and events within the text allows the author to take on many roles and use multiple voices. In this sense, each of the characters in the drawing-telling assumes some element of the author's fictional self, similar to how a child, during play, shifts-in-and-out of various roles (e.g. 'I'll be the mother ... OK, now I'm the baby').

Each character in the drawing-telling is enacted (spoken for), or alternatively narrated (spoken about), while moving between characters within the text. In all cases, however, there is some aspect of enactment which takes place, either close up and personal, as if being the character or, more impersonally, as if talking about the event. The simultaneous sense of child-as-creator and child-as-created evolves as the voices of each of the graphic figures becomes activated—each is created from paper, ink, body and narration—before our very eyes.

Hence, polyvocality offers multiple tellings and multiple readings of an event. The child's act of drawing the figures gives each character a form, a type of being. In addition, the child's accompanying comments such as, 'I'm gonna *do* the dog', 'I'm gonna *grab* the gun' or 'this other car *made that one happen*' give each character/object one or more movement-based roles within one or more events.

The child's drawing-telling reveals relationships and patterns which all contribute to the generation of meaning. Hence, a central aspect of an adult's ability to understand children's meaning-making such as this is linked to their awareness of the agency of the narrator, and the fluidity of the relationships and patterns within the various voices made available through the medium.

The agency of the narrator

In drawing-telling, the child's 'voice' may lie predominantly in the graphic domain rather than in the verbal. In such cases, the image is intended to speak for itself—the sign is expected to be obvious. For instance, the identity or role of a human figure may be assumed by the child to be 'understood', yet this may not be as apparent to an adult. The ambiguity of a sign is caused by the fact that the human figure (and other schema) has the potential to stand for either a generic or a specific character.

For instance, a child's drawn 'person' may represent a universal category, such as 'human', but it can also specifically depict a particular person, such as 'Mummy' or 'Me' (Wright, 2003b). Similarly, a child's schematic drawing of, say, a house, animal or car generally stands

for a prototypical representation; but it can also stand for specific versions of these concepts (e.g. Granny's house, my cat, Dad's car). In addition, the function of the sign may change throughout a telling.

Hence, the understanding of meaning of a sign must be made with reference to the child's purpose. For example, the person illustrated in the drawing below is based on a five-year-old girl's schema for human; however, the variations of her more common prototype include extremely long hair, a long central line to represent the 'core' of the body, and billowing, wing-like shapes to represent the dress. These qualities assist in communicating the message that this is not an 'ordinary' person but, as the telling unfolds, a fairy.

Image 12.



Yet the adult interacting with the young girl did not pick up on these schematic differentiations and began questioning her as if the figure were meant to represent the artist herself: 'is it you?'; 'you're a bride!' The girl did not correct these assumptions, but instead non-verbally complied by nodding in agreement and, subsequently in her telling of the event, referred to the figure as 'me'. However, graphically she continued to develop the content to suit her own purposes, which became a depiction of the fairy's secret garden. A segment of the transcript below illustrates the subtle way in which the young girl asserts the agency of the figure.

A: *Wow, that's beautiful. Tell me about this person. Is it you when you grow up?*

C: *[Nods head yes—although doesn't seem to be sure.]*

A: *Tell me about what is on there.*

C: *[Points to the circle.] This is my head. These are my two eyes and this is my mouth.*

A: *What is the pink?*

C: *Um, the dress.*

A: *It's a beautiful dress. Where are you going in that beautiful dress?*

C: A wedding.

A: Oh, you're a bride! Are you going to get married in that beautiful dress?

C: [Nods.]

A: What's this bit? [Points to the tall, narrow triangular shape on the right-hand side of the page.]

C: The house, and that's [pointing to the trees] the secret garden ... That's grass [below the trees] ... At the bottom [of the garden] is rocks and, um, they're the trees, like we have on the secret garden. That's the house.

A: And why is it a secret?

C: Umm, because it's a fairy house.

A: What's it going to be like inside this house?

C: Umm, beautiful things.

Although the girl asserted that the figure was a fairy (not herself), there were many aspects of the drawing-telling where the graphic content (e.g. the fairy house and secret garden) was intended to 'speak for itself'. It was as if the preschool girl assumed the adult could imagine for herself the details of the garden and what it would be like inside the house—further elaboration seemed redundant. The assumption was that the adult should be able to suspend disbelief along with the child.

The girl's economic use of language implied open-endedness, and an opportunity for multiple meanings. For instance, her response to the question 'what is it going to be like inside this house' (i.e. 'beautiful things') could be taken to mean there would be beautiful objects/resources, such as nice furniture, good food, beautiful paintings on the walls and peaceful music. Alternatively, it could be interpreted to mean that beautiful events would occur there. The open-ended, fluid nature of the child's drawing-telling contained the play-like qualities of imagination, where anything is possible, anything can be. Hence the content and form of her meaning was open to multiple roles, multiple tellings, multiple interpretations and multiple functions.

Multiple functions: Objects and events

Similar to how the agency of the narrator is affected by the child's various subject positionings, the events within a drawing-telling can also shift, and objects and characters that originally functioned in one way may be altered to function in another way later. For instance, at the beginning of one drawing, David (5.9) describes himself as getting some bags out of the boot of his car after coming home from shopping.

Image 13.



Later in the telling, after explaining that 'he' will work as a driver-trainer (in the future) and have his own company car with a Driver Training sign on the top, he changed the function of the car boot from containing groceries to containing a battery (which he needed to turn on to light up the sign after dark).

I'm just getting the spare battery out of the boot. [Draws headlights, taillights and a lit (pink radiating) sign on top of the car.] And ah, the cardboard [sign] has a light on it so you can see it at dark night too.

Such examples of multiple functions of characters and events are made clear through an awareness of the relationships between form and content and structuralist principles of children's expression. Many of these principals have parallel qualities to the text of film.

Filmic textual features

A viewer of film is able to read its images in a similar way to a photograph. Reading photographs involves relating to the signifying functions of characters' 'postures, expressions and gestures; the associations evoked by depicted objects and settings; sequences of photographs ... and relationships with accompanying text' (Barthes, 1977, pp. 21-25).

However, in reading children's drawings-tellings there are additional factors that must be considered, particularly if one is concerned with not only the end product but also the processes of their works-in-the-making. Hence, children's fluidly evolving meaning-making during drawing-telling contains qualities that have figurative equivalencies to filmic textual features, such as the:

- creation of topics, subject-matter, basic themes and the depiction of values
- enactment of characters (e.g. roles, personal qualities, behaviours and goals)
- narration of the plot, structure and events
- formation of objects, scenery, the setting (e.g. history, geography) and decor.

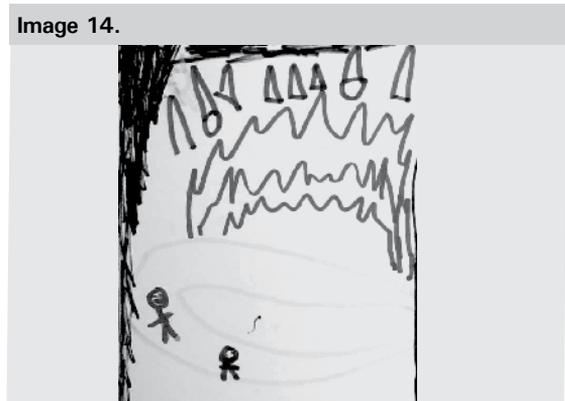
All of these aspects allow the young authors to bring their works to life, similar to how a film director works with various elements to create a final product. In some

ways, observing a child drawing-telling is similar to watching a documentary of the making of a film, being there with the characters on the film set, and observing the techniques of capturing the acting and the action as it occurs. Although the child is not using a camera to shoot the content of the drawing, similar aesthetic decisions are being made in the selection or execution of the graphic content in relation to matters such as:

- light, colour, 'close-ups' (size differentiations and foci) and editing (altering the verbal and/or graphic content during the drawing-telling through techniques such as cutting and fading)
- sequencing (visual and verbal)
- sound (telling, expressive vocalisation and onomatopoeia)
- action (gesture, graphic devices such as 'whoosh' lines and repeated images)
- 'time (compression, flashbacks, flash-forwards, slow motions)' (Tagg, 1988, pp. 63-64)
- space (visual composition, gestural connections).

With regard to time and space, there are elements of children's drawings-tellings that incorporate the film/television concepts of 'frame', 'shot' (a single take) and 'scene' (a sequence of frames which may consist of more than one place and/or time) (Hodge & Tripp, 1986). Many of these filmic features were illustrated in 'Joel the Policeman', described earlier (see image 6). Joel's (6.4) depiction was of two events (filmic scenes) occurring simultaneously in two different parts of the world. He used many techniques to shift between these two scenes, and to bring one side of the world 'alive' while the other side was 'sleeping'.

On the left-hand side (see detail of full work below), in the rectangle taking up the top-third of the page, Joel depicts two athletes (one red Canadian, one green Australian) running around a yellow track, and red jagged lines arching above the track. A segment of the conversation reveals that the jagged lines, and the triangular-shaped objects flying out from them, represent a bomb explosion at an Olympic event:



A: *What have you drawn there?*

C: *Well, this is it here: the Olympics. And that's where the bomb came [red jagged lines] ... and that's all the metal things that came up [green shapes above].*

A: *Mm-hmm. So the red is all where the bomb went off.*

C: *Yeah.*

Joel demonstrated flexibility of thought as he grappled with how to simultaneously illustrate, on one page, two separate events occurring on opposite sides of the world. The difficulty he faced was associated with the fact that he wanted each of the two events to occur during the daytime, but cognitively he knew that when it was daytime on one side of the world, it would be night on the other.

His dual depiction of events actually began on the right-hand side of the page, which is a complicated police-station scene (discussed in more detail later in this segment). Then, he shifted his attention to the left-hand-side theme, the bomb explosion at the Olympics.

He began this scene by drawing a yellow sun in the top-left-hand corner of the page, which included small orange dots between its rays and facial features inside the sun itself. (This particular sun is not visible [i.e. it has been blocked out] for reasons illustrated in the following excerpt—the sun which is visible actually is a third sun that was added later.)

A: *Well, that was an interesting way to do the sun.*

C: *Mmm. Woopsies! I've done the sun at the wrong side.*

A: *Did you? Where did you want to do it?*

C: *Over here [points to the right-hand side of the page].*

A: *Over there? Oh, why's that?*

C: *Because that's the other side of the world, and that's the ... this side [Australia].*

A: *Oh. Right. Well, there's no taking it off now.*

C: *Who cares? I'll just draw over it. [Draws a line to divide the Olympics from the Police Place, about a third of the way in from the left-hand side of the page.]*

A: *So what is the black line for? To show you ...*

C: *To show you which one's dark and which one's light.*

A: *Oh, so one time—place—is daytime, and one's the night-time, is it?*

C: *Yeah.*

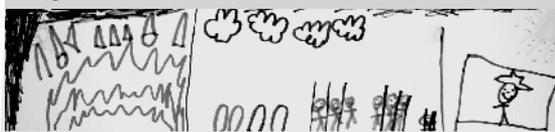
After adding details to the police-station scene, which includes a second sun in the top-right-hand corner (see below), Joel then re-clarifies the daytime/night-time juxtaposition of the two scenes.

Image 15.



He finishes the rectangle to 'frame' the Olympic event on the left-hand side, and then fills out the left border of the rectangular frame with thicker, black colouring-in lines which cover most of the sun. This line extends across the top of the page to connect with the sun on the right-hand side of the page. In so doing, Joel 'fades out' the left-hand scene and 'fades in' the right-hand scene. Having resolved this dilemma, Joel returns to the Olympic scene and turns it back into daytime by drawing a third sun, 'rising' on the other side of the world.

Image 16.



C: [Points to the figures on the track.] And now it's sun ... The sun is shining up here where all the medals are. And it's dark over here at night time. [Squeezes the third sun in between the black scribble-out lines and the metal from the explosion.]

A: So when it's daytime at the Olympics, it's night-time at the jail, is it?

C: Yep.

Image 17.



Joel's ingenious shifting from daytime to night-time and back to daytime again illustrates that he was able to overcome the restrictions of a single scene within his drawing. By including two scenes, he could portray parallel events within one drawing. His recreation of time-space relations allowed for other simultaneous, parallel components which also utilised filmic techniques. For instance, on the right-hand side of the page Joel draws and describes a police station with a police dog in training.

He illustrates the same dog in several different locations, similar to showing a sequence of film frames. He draws a black slide with a brown dog at the base, then a second brown dog at the top of the ladder, and a third brown dog sliding down the slide (the fourth dog seen in this segment is added later in a new scene).

C: [Gestures to show the dog climbing the ladder.] Woops! [Onomatopoeia and gesture to accompany the dog's sliding down the slide.]

A: So that's the dog's training is it?

C: Yeah.

A: And they're training to ... what, run up the ladder, are they?

C: Yeah, and go ... and run down it.

A: Pretty clever, aren't they, to climb up ladders like that? ... OK, and are there three dogs there, or is it the same dog?

C: Well, that's when it's going up [points] and that's when it's up the top [points] and that's when it's going down [points].

A: OK, so there's only really one dog here. It's just in different positions. OK.

To the left of the dog-training slide, Joel draws a blue rectangular police car with red and blue lights on the top. Right of the slide he draws a tall, purple watchtower with a purple policeman standing guard. Then he draws three yellow house-shaped jails, located at the top of the page, above the slide. He adds black vertical bars on the jail, and brown stick figures in the two larger jails.

Image 18.



Once again, Joel repeats images to illustrate a string of events—a policeman and a police dog capturing and jailing a 'bad person'. Joel gives the dog a second role and unfolds another sequence of events—within an integrated plot (Wilson & Wilson, 1977).

A: So who do you keep in there [the jail]?

C: All the bad people. [Draws a green person to the right of the slide, in front of the jail.]

A: Oh, right. Who's that person?

C: Oh, this [scene] is where all the guard dogs are going after the person. [Draws another brown dog, left of the dog in the top position on the slide.]

A: Oh, is he sort of running away, is he?

C: Yeah. Because he's the one that's escaping [points to the green stick figure near the slide]. But here [in this part of the scene] they caught him and put him in jail. [Draws another green stick figure in a third, small jail to show that he is now captured and back in jail.]

Finally, Joel illustrates another before-and-after event by repeating images to represent shifts in time and space. When asked what he will do in the future, he describes moving to a different house, and shows his before-and-after houses in two locations.

Image 19.



First he draws a black stylised house in the bottom-right-hand corner of the page, with a stick figure standing beside it. 'This [scene] is when I'm leaving home.' Then he adds a thin house, squeezed in between the police car and the frame of the Olympic event (where he will live in the future). 'And here's [points to bottom right-hand corner] where I am ... where I'm living now.'

To summarise the key components of his graphic-narration, Joel was invited to give his work a title.

C: Um ... This is the bomb explosion and this is the police place.

A: The police place? So it's 'The bomb explosion' ...

C: Yep. Up behind the police ...

A: And ...

C: 'The police place'.

Ironically, when asked if there was a story that goes with the drawing, Joel presented a truncated, purely verbal version, which bore very little resemblance to the richness of images, objects, events and dual-depiction of world affairs that were drawn, told and enacted during his 30-minute 'graphic-narrative play' (Wright, 2005, in press). Joel essentially 'fast forwarded' to the very last episode, skipping everything else that had led up to this. He simply reiterated this final segment, as if to comply with the adult requirement of providing a synopsis of his present-and-future event: 'This is when I'm an adult, and I'm leaving home. And this is where I'm a ... when I'm bigger.'

This truncated version of a story is the type of rendition that adults often hear when they ask children to tell them about their artworks after the event. Such 'stories' are not representative of the full drawing event, and often do little justice to the depth of children's thinking and feeling that may have occurred. Unless we witness the full event, our versions of children's drawing-telling experiences are devoid of all the enacted details and, consequently, can remain at a relatively superficial level—stagnant, truncated and often emotionless.

Yet, if we enter into the child's drawing-telling, we come to realise the 'co-emergence' of content, substance, form and expression, and how their work is a *composition in progress*. It is an unfolding meaning-making experience that builds layer upon layer of perceptions, thoughts and feelings, which generally cannot be summarised adequately after the event.

This is because the text of children's drawings-tellings often involves 'graphic-ing' and 'telling' the characters, themes/plots/events, objects/scenery/settings, methods (e.g. fade-ins and fade-outs, frames of movement) and integrated events. Hence, filmic analysis can be a key feature for understanding children's creation, communication and interpretation of meaning through drawing-telling.

Summary

The essence of young children's meaning-making is a synthesis of thought, body and emotion (Wright, 2003a, 2003b). Their rich and integrated creations include many signs—words, graphic devices, onomatopoeia, writing, gestures/postures—which stand for or represent other things. Children's meaning-making shifts fluidly between intratextual components such as graphic images (e.g. objects, characters), labelling, 'whoosh' lines, captions and other techniques that help anchor the text.

Such relationships all contribute to the generation of meaning through dynamic enactment, which is similar to roleplay on paper (Wright, 2005, in press). Consequently, at times there can be unclear boundaries between child-as-subject and child-as-spectator, and between child-as-creator and child-as-created.

This blurring of boundaries is often reflected in the vibrant and evolving nature of the agency of children's narration. Fluidity in children's expression is reflected in their polyvocality and in the multiple functions they give to characters, objects and events. Hence, to understand children's meaning, interpretation must involve an awareness of the sequential and structural relationships within aspects of their works, which often are analogous to filmic features.

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