

# Introduction

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Let me take you back to one evening during the 10<sup>th</sup> European conference on developmental psychology held in Uppsala, Sweden in 2001. After having spent a pleasant evening dining at a restaurant with my fellow contributors to a symposium on children's drawings held earlier that day, I joined a nearby table of other conferences delegates most of whom I recognised except for two young ladies. They told me that they were Sarah Bird and Lindsey Howarth, that they worked for Blackwell publishing, and that many of the people on their table wrote books for them. I excitedly told them that I had been thinking about writing a book. They appeared interested and enquired what it would be on, and because a full answer would not have been appropriate in this context, I simply said, 'children's drawings'. By this point most of those present on the table were listening to our conversation, and heard Lindsey's instant reply, 'well, that would sell about three copies!' I soon was able to forgive her as, upon her and Sarah's invitation, the three of us met up over lunch during a British Psychological Society conference in England a month later. I knew that if I got their full and undivided attention I could sell the idea to them. And I did and here it is.

The point of the story is not so much to tell you how this book was conceived as to highlight a view held by some, and encapsulated by Lindsey's initial reaction, that the study of children making and understanding of pictures has only limited academic and educational importance. Such a view cannot derive from a scarcity of pictures in the world. In fact, we live in a world that is proliferated with and influenced by pictures. We have what might be called 'serious' art that is found in art

galleries and museums, but we do not have to make a special visit to see pictures. They appear on just about everything we buy, advertising and informing us of the contents of our purchase. Pictures displayed in road signs enable us to travel safely from one place to another. Pictures are found in most books, magazines, newspapers and comics serving a variety of purposes that include their aesthetic communication, to illustrate the accompanying text, to express moods and ideas, and even to make us laugh. Through the creation of photography the ability to capture the visual likeness of our world is no longer restricted to some artists but available to all who have access to a camera. Realism in pictures has been extended through the invention of 'moving' pictures in film, where we can see on large cinema screens and television sets the finite incremental movements ingrained in real-life events or in animated stories,.

Although we live in a pictorial world it is created by relatively few adults (e.g., artists, illustrators, cartoonists, photographers, film makers). The engagement with pictures for the majority of adults is at the observational and interpretation level. But for most adults there was an earlier period in their lives in which they were very much engaged in the production of pictures. As children, we created a massive collection of pictures, particularly drawings. If we want to understand the human engagement with pictures then studying children's engagement with pictures is a necessity.

But it is not sufficient for the argument for studying children's interaction with pictures that children do a lot of it. Children breathe a lot but few would be interested enough to research it. The study of children's making and understanding of pictures has to be informative, both in respect of issues within the subject of children and pictures per se but also to more general aspects of the psychology and education of the child. The objective of the book, therefore, is to encourage an appreciation of the

importance of studying children's making and understanding of pictures, particularly drawings as they represent a significant contribution to children's picture making.

With this objective in mind I have written nine chapters that provide a detailed analysis of the literature pertaining to nine topics within the broad area of children and pictures. In Chapter 1 ('the development of representational drawing') I provide both an historical and contemporary account of the development of children representing subject matter from life in their drawings, and the range of psychological factors that influence that development. An account of the development of children's drawings would be incomplete, however, without an understanding of children's expression of their feelings and ideas towards the people, things and events that they represent. In Chapter 2 ('the development of expressive drawing'), therefore, I examine the expressive devices that children use, and discuss the nature of its developmental pattern and what may influence it. Chapter 3 ('production and comprehension of representational drawing') turns our attention back to representational drawing but in the context of the relationship between children's understanding of pictures they see and the making of their own drawings. This reminds us that children's engagement in pictures is not limited to their own drawings but in how they understand pictures in general. A key milestone in understanding pictures is to appreciate their dual nature; that they are things in themselves as well as symbols that refer to some other reality. Children's development to gaining a fully mature conception of pictures' dual nature, and how this is influenced by the development of cognitive factors, is discussed in Chapter 4 ('children's understanding of the dual nature of pictures'). As children's developing cognition undoubtedly affects their pictorial understanding we might expect that by studying children's drawings we can understand the child's mind. Consistent with this approach, in Chapter 5 ('drawings as measures of internal

representations') I discuss the representational redescription theory that claims that by studying children's representation drawings we can gain insight into the nature and development of the corresponding internal representations of the subject matter stored in the child's mind.

Whereas the material discussed in Chapter 4 and 5 would be of most interest to academics, we must remember that there are a number of different practitioners who have direct contact with children and their pictorial world. It is in Chapters 6, 7 and 8 that I discuss issues most relevant to practitioners, but are of interest also to researchers. In Chapter 6 ('drawings as clinical aids') I evaluate the use of children's drawings in clinical practice, particularly in respect of the use and validity of the diagnostic drawing tests. In Chapter 7 ('drawings as memory aids') I assess the efficacy of asking children to draw as an aid for their memory recall of previous experiences, a practice that has potential implications for children's recall in clinical and eye-witness testimony settings. While drawing can undoubtedly be used as a means to another end, we must not forget that drawing is an activity that should be nurtured for its own sake. Hence, in Chapter 8 ('education of drawing'), I discuss the variety of educational influences on children's drawings. In Chapter 9 ('cultural influences on children's drawings') I reflect upon children's picture making as a world-wide activity, the study of which gives us a picture of the many and varied cultural influences on children throughout the world. Finally, in Chapter 10 ('future directions') I tie together some of the strands covered in this book in order to highlight some questions we should address in the future in this interesting and pervasive domain of activity in children's lives.

I hope to persuade any reader of this book that by studying children's engagement with pictures we can understand better more generic aspects of children's

development, but also that the child's pictorial world, like the domains of language and numeracy, is a necessary topic to study in its own right.

A big thank you if you have bought this book and please let Lindsey know if you find out who the other two were.