



**UNIVERSITY OF  
STIRLING**

# **Drawing as a Method for Accessing Young Children's Perspectives in Research**

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## GLOSSARY

**Criterial aspects:** The features of a representation which are viewed as essential or sufficiently representative to communicate meaning within a specific situation, context and given audience.

**Free drawing(s) (FD):** Spontaneous drawing(s) instigated by the child.

**Interest:** This is what motivates an individual's sign creation (Kress 1997/2010). Interest is socially and individually shaped, guiding how meaning is conveyed using criterial aspects of the object or concept.

**Modal affordance:** This describes how modes convey meaning in different ways. Certain modes will allow us to convey particular meaning, for different purposes and within various contexts. These can be complimentary ways of conveying additional as well as alternative information.

**Mode:** Resources which we use to represent and convey meaning i.e. things which allow us to make meaning evident such as colour, image, text, logos, fashion, or gaze. These tend to be socially constructed thus becoming cultural resources.

**Multimodality:** A field of application or approach which considers communication as always using more than one semiotic mode to convey meaning.

**Past free drawings (PFD):** Children's spontaneous drawings produced at an earlier date, not in the presence of the researcher or within research context.

**Perspectives:** A particular evaluation of a situation or facts especially from one person's point of view.

**Prompt question (PQ):** Question used by researcher in prompted drawing activity to instigate the production of drawings on a particular topic.

**Prompted drawing(s) (PD):** Drawings prompted by the researcher during drawing activity.

**Semiotics:** The study and theory of signs. It is a theory of signification, sign production and interpretation of meaning as signs and symbols (often as systems of communication).

**Sign:** The basic semiotic unit which 'stands for' something other than itself. This is the means by which people express and interpret meaning in the world (MODE 2012).

**Social semiotics:** Social semiotics is a branch of the field of semiotics which focuses on studying signs and meaning-making within specific social and cultural contexts. Hence, the foundation of the theory is guided by the idea that signs and messages are always embedded in the social: created, used and interpreted within the contexts of social processes and social relations. Central to social semiotics are mode, semiotic resource, motivated sign, and interest.

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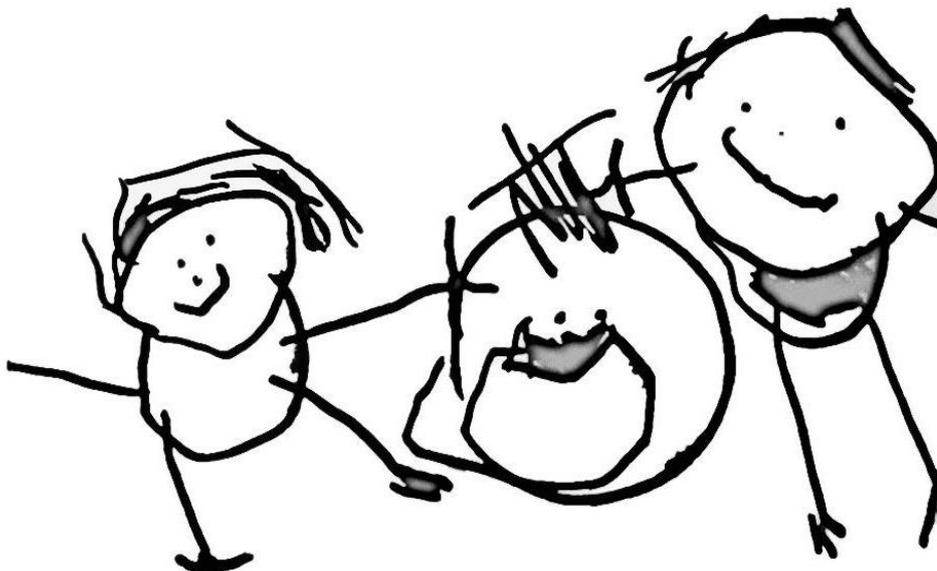
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Those close to me know the appreciation I have for their unfaltering belief in me.



## **DECLARATION**

I certify that this thesis reports original work by me and is the result of my own research conducted during my PhD studentship under the guidance of Professor Lydia Plowman and Dr Christine Stephen.

I have endeavoured to clearly state any reference to the work of others. This primarily relates to the use of literature to guide and contextualise my research.

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## ABSTRACT

Researchers have taken a particular interest in children's drawings as a means of representing and communicating knowledge and perspectives but a review of literature reveals that researchers routinely use drawings as a way of obtaining data without considering their function or value. This ESRC-funded research aims to explore drawing as a method of accessing children's perspectives and has three central research objectives which consider methodological and analytical factors relating to the use of children's drawings as a research tool. These are: to develop a principled approach to analysing and interpreting children's drawings, to create guidelines for the use of drawing as a research tool, and to gather children's perspectives on play through the method of drawing. The research objectives were achieved by asking the following three questions: How can children's drawings be analysed using a principled approach? What are the major factors to be considered when using drawing as a research tool? What can drawings reveal about children's perspectives on play?

The study involved two visits to the homes of eight preschool children aged four. The sample included four girls and four boys from central and north-east Scotland with half of the families being categorised as being of low socioeconomic status. Visits were flexible and unstructured allowing the child autonomy regarding our level of interaction and the types of activities (such as free play and conversation) with which they wished to engage. The second visit included a prompted drawing activity in which I invited children to express their perspectives on play. The topic of play was chosen (i) to offer children a meaningful research activity to investigate the issues surrounding the method, (ii) to explore the task of representing an abstract, yet familiar, concept and how this may influence children's drawings and representations of play, and (iii) as an extension of the ESRC project *Young Children Learning with Toys and Technology at Home* (Plowman *et al.*, 2012) by giving greater emphasis to children's own perspectives on play and exploring the ways in which this can be achieved.

My theoretical approach is not to consider drawings as reproductions of reality, but to value and attempt to understand children's drawings as a semiotic vehicle in which messages are created and conveyed during the drawing process through representation and

signification. Informed by social semiotics (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996) the research presents an innovative four-step approach to analysing children's drawings (4-SASA). The protocol, a key contribution of the research, was developed to promote a more systematic analysis, involving (i) isolating signs within drawings through manual annotation, (ii) documenting the child's understanding of signs and the significance attributed to them, (iii) organising signs using specific categories of social semiotic analysis (mode, size, colour, salience) and identifying the child's motivation and interest for specific sign production, and (iv) synthesis of the child's perspectives from steps 1-3.

Post hoc methodological examinations elucidated the following four key factors to be considered when using young children's drawings: (i) contextual sensitivity of the drawing process, (ii) children's perceptions of the research task, (iii) the complex task of representing an abstract and elusive concept such as play, and (iv) whether there is a fundamental difference between drawing spontaneously (non-commissioned) and drawing on request.

Evidence from the study supports previous literature in demonstrating the potential of drawing as a method of accessing children's perspectives. However, findings suggest that rather than routinely selecting drawing as a method for representing children's perspectives, researchers need to be more thoughtful about the ways in which factors such as the social and contextual framing of drawing and approaches to data collection can affect research outcomes. The thesis concludes by discussing how these emerging issues impact research outcomes, along with implications for future implementation and analysis of drawings.

## **CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. Overview**

This chapter introduces the rationale for my study and outlines my aim, research objectives, and research questions. These were used to guide the research and related discussion. The final section of this chapter describes the structure of my thesis which is organised into eight distinct chapters.

### **1.2. Introducing the study**

Researchers have taken a particular interest in children's drawings as a means of representing and communicating knowledge and perspectives but a review of literature reveals that researchers routinely use drawings as a way of obtaining data without considering their function or process of creation. This ESRC-funded research aims to explore drawing as a method of accessing children's perspectives and has three central research objectives which consider methodological and analytical factors relating to the use of children's drawings as a research tool.

The study stems from the School of Education's ESRC research project on 'Young Children Learning with Toys and Technology at Home' (Plowman *et al.*, 2012). The project examined preschool children's experiences of play, learning, and the role of technology in their everyday lives. The research had raised issues regarding the complexities of gathering preschool children's perspectives. Therefore, I chose to focus

my research on how young children's perspectives can be accessed through a familiar method such as drawing. My research explores the use of drawing as a method for gathering young children's perspectives by taking a critical look at the tool routinely considered as child-friendly and particularly appropriate for children in the preschool years. In this study I refer to 'young children', which in this instance means children under five years old.

The thesis neither advocates nor discourages the use of drawing. Rather I attempt to demonstrate, through its application in my empirical work and research process, the type of information that drawing can generate and in what circumstances the method can be restrictive. The research intends to exemplify both the positive outcomes drawing can offer in the research process, as well as the challenges which can be faced by the researcher and participant.

Throughout the thesis I raise questions and issues which may help other researchers think through approaches to data collection and interpretation, and the dilemmas arising from using children's drawings in their own research. One of the main outcomes of the thesis is a set of guidelines which can be found in Appendix 5. This is not a checklist or prescription for using drawings. Rather I view these as a tool for critical reflection, and useful information which can support researchers when using and choosing the method of drawing. In addition, the study will raise awareness of factors which need to be considered when using drawing as a method for accessing young children's perspectives. This includes the challenging task of interpreting young children's representations. Accordingly, Chapter 5 outlines a 4-step approach to the semiotic analysis of children's drawings (4-SASA) which was developed throughout my research process. This arose from my interest in using a social semiotic framework to interpret drawings and by investigating how this could be done in a systematic manner.

This research is applicable to any discipline attempting to use drawing as a research tool. By exploring the method, I hope to encourage researchers to question the use and function of drawing within the research process.

### *1.2.1. Why drawing?*

All children are individuals. This is very evident in drawings where young children demonstrate idiosyncratic drawings styles, colour choice, facture<sup>1</sup>, use of symbols, and picture content. Therefore, drawings may highlight individualistic viewpoints more so than conversation or writing which may generate less detailed or more generic descriptions of the same objects or scenes. For example, preschool children may have limited resources to express an idea or object through written language because they have not yet learned to form all the letters of the alphabet or create sentences. In contrast, the resources children have at their disposal to create a drawing could be considered far more extensive. For instance, children can use:

- different colours to represent specific objects such as yellow for the sun and white for the moon
- different lines to represent particular contexts and landscapes such as zig-zags to suggest grass or wavy lines to denote water
- different shapes to replicate objects in real life such as circles to represent balls, or squares and rectangles for vehicles and houses
- different sizes and composition to suggest relationships and distinguishing features of objects within a scene.

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<sup>1</sup> Facture refers to the manner in which marks are made on the paper; for instance using staccato strokes, dots and so forth.

As a result, drawings could be viewed as a fruitful tool for accessing children's perspectives (Driessnack, 2005; Hill, 1997a; Thomson, 2008). These discussions also suggest that children's drawings are unique and can vary greatly from child to child, and situation or context. For instance, Cox argues

Picture-making is not simply an automatic consequence of maturation but involves a learned set of abilities which, although related to children's developing motor and cognitive skills, is also influenced by culture in which they live. (Cox, 2005b :289)

Consequently, the task of analysing these diverse drawings and accessing children's own meanings may prove challenging (Atkinson, 2002; Dockett & Perry, 2005).

The continuing developments in social and cultural perceptions of childhood and views towards children as participants suggest the child should be central in the research process (Christensen, 2004; Clark, 2011; James & Prout, 1997). However, we cannot assume that using drawing guarantees child-centred research. Some argue that there is often an 'assumption that the tools themselves somehow automatically enable participation' (Waller & Bitou, 2011:5). Therefore, many researchers view the method of drawing as child-friendly: a tool which children respond to, engage in and enjoy. However, this may not be the case for every child in every context. Some studies have demonstrated that for some children, drawing is not welcomed as a positive experience (Einarsdottir *et al.*, 2009). They simply, 'do not like, or see the point, in drawings' (Dockett & Perry, 2005:515; Einarsdottir *et al.*, 2009). Accordingly, 'The ways in which particular research methods enable or constrain children's participation in the research deserves careful consideration' (Mitchell, 2006:60). Crosser (2008) develops this by describing how the child's cultural context and associated conventions greatly

influence whether or not drawing will emerge in children's daily repertoire. This, in turn, would affect children's familiarity with the method and whether this is a preferred means of communication. These arguments suggest that drawing, contrary to many assumptions, may not suit all children (Fargas-Malet *et al.*, 2010).

Many studies use the method of drawing without detailed consideration of how particular methodological factors impact its success as a communicative tool. For instance, some studies gloss over important procedural information such as prompt questions or framing of the research task (Bessas *et al.*, 2006; Owens, 2005; Tanner, 2010). This may affect the researcher in two ways. Firstly, there is extensive literature on the influence of contextual issues and motivation upon children's drawings (Anning & Ring, 2004; Cox, 2005b; Malchiodi, 1998) and so it is important for the researcher to be informed about how these aspects of the methodology and procedure impact children's drawings, drawing process, and research outcomes. In the absence of this information it is difficult to make judgements about how particular approaches and methodologies influence the efficacy of using drawing as a research tool. Secondly, the absence of such information makes methods and approaches difficult to replicate. If we are to construct children's perspectives from the drawings they create, then we should not overlook that children produce pictures for a number of reasons: facilitating the development and expression of thoughts and emerging concepts; translating feelings and emotions; communicating information; as aesthetic object; or sheer pleasure (Matthews, 1997; Matthews, 2003). For this reason, we must be wary of making assumptions in relation to both the role drawing may play for children within the research context, as well as the extent to which each child uses (or *chooses* to use) the method as a communicative device. In addition, we need to be aware of how particular

methodological factors impact the function of drawing as a method within the research process.

Although many of the studies discussed in Chapter 2 claim that using drawing as a method was successful...what does a *successful* method actually mean? A method may be considered successful if the desired data is produced, or that children were engaged. However, this success may not be on account of the method itself. From this perspective we can acknowledge that methods do not exist, and are not used, in a vacuum. A method's success may be greatly dependent on the other factors such as methodological approaches adopted, the context, or the researchers themselves. For instance, how does a potentially fun activity such as drawing change for the child when the researcher asks them to draw something specific? If we consider that the success of a method may lie in the approaches and methodology employed, then there are many factors which can influence the efficacy of drawing as a research tool. If researchers do not consider these, then we may be restricting the communicative potential of drawing as a method for accessing children's perspectives. Any participant, irrespective of age or background, will only freely interact and share their perspectives with the researcher if they feel comfortable in the situation and have some familiarity with the methods of communication.

From these observations, I questioned whether researchers presuppose the communicative potential of drawings without considering its dynamic and changing roles for the child? Furthermore, how do social and contextual issues influence the method of drawing, and as a result shape the data we gather and use to construct children's perspectives?

In order to address these issues, I developed the following research question: **What are the major factors to be considered when using drawing as a research tool?**

By identifying the key factors I hope that researchers can use these to ask themselves important questions regarding their own approaches to using children's drawings, ensuring the main considerations have been addressed in the application, interpretation and analysis of drawings.

### *1.2.2. Topic of drawings: why play?*

The reason for choosing play as the topic of children's prompted drawing was threefold: (i) to offer children a meaningful research activity to investigate the issues surrounding the method, (ii) to explore the task of representing an abstract, yet familiar, concept and how this may influence children's drawings and representations of play, and finally (iii) to serve as an extension of the ESRC project Young Children Learning with Toys and Technology at Home (Plowman *et al.*, 2012) by giving greater emphasis to children's own perspectives on play and exploring the ways in which this can be achieved.

My interest in the nature of representing play, as well as abstract concepts in general, arose from an early experience during the pilot study where, upon asking a child if they can draw anything that they think of when they hear the word play, they responded quizzically with, 'Soooo... I'm trying to think of what I play with? ...and I draw a toy?' This episode elucidated how children may approach the task of representing play, interpreting what aspect of play was to be represented, and how this is translated to a visual image.

Indeed, play is renowned for being an indefinable, ambiguous and contested concept (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010; Meire, 2007; Sutton-Smith, 1997). Although play may be viewed as an abstract concept for children to represent, many other studies ask children to draw concepts of similar abstraction, such as: the environment (Alerby, 2000), headache and pain (Stafstrom *et al.*, 2002), or, poverty (Camfield, 2010). I explore this in greater detail through the findings and discussion chapters to consider how the task of representing an abstract concept may complicate the drawing process.

It is important to note that from a qualitative perspective, the primary objective is not to find universal truths. Instead, the focus is on what we can learn about others' experiences. In terms of my research objectives, I am not attempting to discover how it feels to be a child, or more specifically, a child playing. Instead, I am interested in what their experiences of play are in everyday life, and to elucidate children's definitions, ideas and concepts of play.

In the past, authors have argued that there are 'few attempts to understand children's lives 'in their own 'terms'' (Morrow & Richards, 1996:97). However, in more recent studies, researchers have sought to rectify this by addressing topics and issues of relevance to children, and engaging in critical discussion regarding the efficacy and requirements of research methods adopted when working with children, as well as the ethical complexities of conducting research with children (Alanen, 2001; Darbyshire *et al.*, 2005; Greene & Hill, 2005; Irwin & Johnson, 2005; Punch, 2002; Thomson, 2008).

On account of these observations, another primary research question became: **What can drawings reveal about children's perspectives on play?**

### *1.2.3. Why analysis?*

A third research question arose from both a practical requirement and theoretical inspiration: **How can children's drawings be analysed using a principled approach?**

A review of literature revealed that researchers routinely use drawings as a way of obtaining data from children but few adopt analytical techniques that take account of the child's signification, or the multimodality of young children's drawings. Multimodality refers to a field of application which considers communication as something far beyond language: or at least language in the traditional sense. Although drawing is often considered as a visual method, from a social semiotic perspective, it is a multimodal method. What is meant by multimodal is that conveying meaning through drawing goes beyond the visual image, as perceived on the page. The few studies that had recognised children's multimodal approach to drawing did not make their analytical process explicit.

There remain remarkably few guides to methods of interpreting visual materials, and even fewer explanations of how to do those methods, despite the huge academic work currently being published on things visual. (Rose, 2007:xiv)

As a result, in the absence of detailed methods of interpretation, choosing or replicating analytical procedures on my own data proved problematic. Kress (2010) affirms that images remain a problematic and complex mode of communication to analyse. Unlike other forms of data, there are few well-defined or widely accepted rules for the analysis of visual images: in particular, children's drawings. It is argued that this may be because, 'there is not, at the moment, an established theoretical framework within which visual forms of representation can be discussed' (Kress & van Leeuwen,

1996:21). In addition, young children's drawings may be particularly challenging to interpret because

For children in their early, preschool years there is both more and less freedom of expression: more, because they have not yet learnt to confine the making of signs to the culturally and socially facilitated media, and because they are unaware of established conventions and relatively unconstrained in the making of signs; less, because they do not have such rich cultural semiotic resources available as do adults. (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996:7)

Hodge and Kress (1988) state that 'everything in a culture can be seen as a form of communication...to be understood in terms of a common set of rules or principles'. However, it should be noted that certain forms of visual communication, such as children's drawings, are open to creative invention and innovation; each mark inspiring and influencing the creation of the next. So unlike other, more structured, modes of visual communication (such as road signs), children's drawings do not necessarily emerge from a prescriptive system of representation, constructed from a bank of basic units, bound by strict rules to which one can refer for interpretation or understanding (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001).

Backett-Milburn and McKie (1999) reinforce the complexities of using drawing as a research tool in their extensive literature review. They revealed that researchers can be uncertain about how to interpret drawing data as well as the most appropriate analytical techniques to adopt. Likewise, analytical techniques must acknowledge the shifting approaches in terms of interpreting children's drawings. An important point raised in a paper by Fargas-Malet et al. (2010:183) is that

Until recently, researchers focused exclusively on what they understood the child's drawing meant rather than on the child's explanation of what the drawing was about.

The cross-disciplinary nature of semiotics lends itself to a variety of contexts, suiting many purposes; while its principles allow analysis of a range of data using a single comparative coding system (Hodge & Kress, 1988). Although the use of social semiotics as a tool for visual analysis has been written about extensively (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001; Kress, 1997; Kress, 2010; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Mavers, 2011); providing a definitive account of *how* social semiotics should be applied specifically to *young* children's drawings remains a difficult task. The main issues are: (i) the lack of worked examples which are necessary on account of the idiosyncrasy of young children's drawings, and (ii) the fact that researchers do not always make their analytical process explicit, in particular how the multimodal nature of children's drawing process is acknowledged and used in their interpretation (Buldu, 2006; Eleftheriou *et al.*, 2012; Hopperstad, 2010; Soundy & Drucker, 2010). Nonetheless, Kress and van Leeuwen's approach to visual analysis (1996) does provide a comprehensive descriptive framework for interpreting images. However, the lack of working examples of its use with young children's drawings throughout other literature posed a challenge when using the theory as a formal analytical technique. I sought after a principled and more straightforward method which documented each stage of analysis. In other words, *when presented with a child's drawing, what do I do next?*

Accordingly, the first question used to address the research aim primarily focused on the identification of an analytical technique that can offer a systematic method of analysing children's drawings while also reflecting my approach in terms of valuing children's drawings as more than the final product. Hence, it was necessary to

determine how drawings could be analysed while privileging children's attribution of meaning rather than an approach which centred on adult interpretations. I sought after a technique which used a social semiotic framework and children's explicit explanations of their drawings in order to facilitate my interpretations. To further explain the generation of the aforementioned research question, I will briefly introduce my theoretical framework.

My approach is not concerned with reproductions of the world to attain truths relating to play experiences. Rather it is founded on the idea that signification is the reproduction of reality as the child perceives it and lives it. Therefore, the approach values and attempts to understand children's drawings as a method of communication or a semiotic vehicle. A social semiotic theory of communication stems from the premise that language, in whatever form, is social (Jewitt, 2012). Therefore, signs and messages are always situated within various social contexts where meaning is represented and conveyed through an apt form. In other words, the theory of communication here is based on the idea that all language is a form of meaning-making or semiosis involving expressing what one wants to communicate, in a particular mode, representing this in a culturally accepted manner, to be then interpreted by another (Hodge & Kress, 1988). Social semiotics will therefore facilitate the exploration of individuals' visual communicative practices as representations of their perspectives, and the wider culture and subcultures to which they belong. In this study, what is perceived by children, as well as what is expressed through their choice of representations, will bear some reflection of the concepts and ideas existing within society and the cultural practices which are unique to the child, their drawings and their play.

Informed by social semiotics (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996), a four-step approach for analysing children's drawings was developed to allow a more systematic analytical technique, as well as privileging the child's descriptions rather than adult interpretations (Ch. 5). Indeed, the construction of a systematic analytical technique may have been ambitious as a researcher new to social semiotics. However, the technique was not created a priori, but emerged as a long evolving process shaped by my own objectives and requirements for analysis and the drawing data. The resulting 4-SASA may not be a foolproof solution to analysing young children's drawing; however, it provides one option which can facilitate the complex process of interpreting children's drawings using their own meanings.

#### ***1.2.4. Introducing the study: summary***

With the proliferation of visual methods and the growing complexity of methodological and epistemological concerns created by the reconceptualization of childhood, there is an increasing requirement for researchers to review their current practice when venturing into research with children.

The literature review suggests that researchers routinely use drawings as a way of obtaining data from young children but few adopt methodological and analytical techniques that take account of the multimodality and idiosyncrasy of young children's drawings. In addition, the review revealed that there was a lack of explicit guidelines for using the method of drawing as a research tool with young children, such as the use of prompted vs. non-commissioned drawing, and techniques for analysis, which essentially led to the rationale for my research. The main gaps (or scarcity of empirical studies) in the existing literature were identified as: (i) research which acknowledges

the child's drawing process in both interpretation and analysis of children's drawings, (ii) accessing preschool children's perspectives on play, (iii) research with preschool children in the context of the family home, and (iv) inquiry into the implications of prompting children to draw.

With this in mind, my objective is to explore the use of drawing as a research tool: examining its strengths and weaknesses and identifying important methodological and analytical issues which researchers may need to consider when using the method to facilitate children's communication. Informed by the literature, I will examine two approaches for gathering children's drawings: (i) prompting children to draw, and (ii) gathering children's spontaneous drawings. Inspired by Kress's theory of children's meaning-making and communication (Kress, 1997), and informed by Kress and van Leeuwen's social semiotic framework (1996), I will explore a principled approach to the social semiotic analysis of young children's drawings. Based on my interpretation of social semiotics, I present the systematic process of analysis developed and used in this study. Finally, the study will provide some suggested guidelines to assist researchers when using drawing as a method of accessing young children's perspectives. These are not a prescription for using children's drawings as a research tool, but rather some considerations which may encourage researchers to critically reflect on factors influencing the method.

The study involved two visits to the homes of eight preschool children aged four. The sample included four girls and four boys from central and north-east Scotland with half of the families being categorised as being of low socioeconomic status. Visits were flexible and unstructured allowing the child autonomy regarding our level of interaction and the types of activities with which they wished to engage such as playing outside,

drawing, playing games, and conversations. The second visit included a prompted drawing activity in which I invited children to express their perspectives on play.

My approach is to value children's drawings as a semiotic vehicle. In other words, viewing drawing as a means of communication where messages are created within the drawing process through representation and signification. Correspondingly, I appreciated the representations as expressing the child's unique interpretation of play rather than based on the ease of interpretation, realism or whether the child drew a conventional representation of play.

The study provides a small but unique contribution to our understanding of preschool children's conceptualisation, experiences and understanding of play. The research takes a reflexive approach to using young children's drawings as a research tool and addresses the complexities of using and interpreting drawings as representations of children's perspectives.

I interrogate current literature on using children's drawings as a research tool while considering the developments in epistemological concerns regarding research with children and developments in the credibility and validity of using visual methods and data. My research contributes to current literature and research practice relating to:

- The methodological complexities of using drawings as a research tool
- The application of social semiotics to facilitate interpretation and analysis of children's drawings
- Young children's perspectives on play
- Conducting research with preschool children in the home context.

I address the identified issues in the thesis by setting three research objectives and research questions outlined in the following section.

### **1.3. Aims, objectives, and research questions**

Based on the preceding issues, the aim of this research is to:

#### **Explore drawing as a research tool for accessing young children's perspectives**

Following an interrogation of current literature and the issues raised in the beginning of this chapter, a number of concerns were identified regarding how researchers use the method of drawing to gather children's perspectives. These included using drawing within a research context, the framing and topic of drawings, and elicitation methods. There were also issues pertaining to how drawings are treated as data and analysed. The research was designed to achieve the following three research objectives:

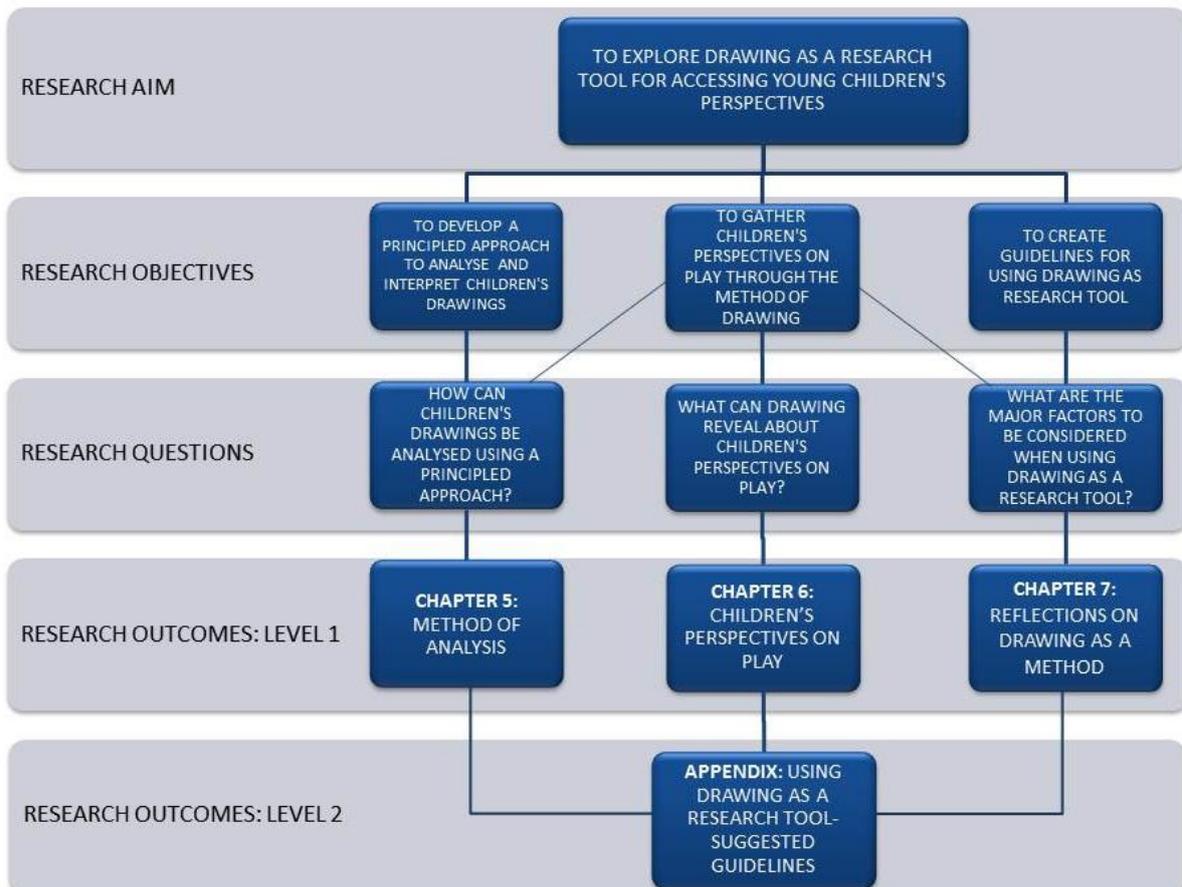
**RO. 1 To develop a principled approach to analysing and interpreting children's drawings**

**RO. 2 To create guidelines for the use of drawing as a research tool**

**RO. 3 To gather children's perspectives on play through the method of drawing**

Three research questions were formulated to investigate the overarching research aim. The purpose of my research questions was to focus the breadth and scope of the research while allowing in-depth exploration of the research aim. The thesis answers the following three research questions:

- RQ1. How can children’s drawings be analysed using a principled approach?**
- RQ2. What are the major factors to be considered when using drawing as a research tool?**
- RQ3. What can drawings reveal about children's perspectives on play?**



**Figure 1.1:** An overview of research aims, objectives and research questions and how these are achieved and answered throughout the thesis.

#### **1.4. Organisation of the thesis**

Following this introductory chapter, the remainder of the thesis is organised into seven chapters which are summarised below. The thesis is not structured in the most traditional way. This is partly due to the analytical technique being an important aspect of my research outcomes (detailed in Figure 1.1.) and so it is outlined in a separate chapter and appears in the middle of the thesis rather than at the end with the remaining research outcomes.

##### Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter provides a summary of studies using children's drawings as a research tool; covering themes such as methodological approaches, subjects children are asked to draw, and approaches to interpretation. The literature review sets a wider context for my research, illustrating how it fits into the existing literature on the use of children's drawings as a research tool. The review also draws on the literature to elucidate the complexities of analysing children's drawings while maintaining qualitative research principles in terms of privileging and valuing meanings which children have themselves ascribed to their representations. Finally, the chapter highlights gaps in the literature, demonstrating the need for further examination of issues surrounding the use of drawing as a research tool such as task prompts, approaches to data collection, and its use with preschool children.

##### Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter describes the underpinning methodological and theoretical approaches and principles of my research. These include: qualitative approaches, reflexivity, the positioning and conceptualisation of children and its implications for research practice, ethical issues, and theoretical framework.

#### Chapter 4: Research Design and Procedure

This chapter provides a detailed account of the empirical data collection. I describe the following aspects of research design and procedures: research tools, materials, pre-pilot and pilot stages, accessing the sample, methods of consent, drawing activities, ethical considerations, and analysis.

#### Chapter 5: A 4-Step Approach to the Semiotic Analysis of Children's Drawings

On account of the analytical technique being a significant outcome of the research and one of my key contributions, it warranted separate discussion as a distinct chapter. The chapter begins with a brief summary of the theoretical framework which underpins my analytical approach. I then discuss how the 4-step approach to the semiotic analysis of children's drawings emerged as the outcome of my research. This is followed by a detailed description of each step of the analytical technique. I conclude the chapter by summarising the outcomes of my analysis in terms of children's perspectives on play.

#### Chapter 6: Children's Perspectives on Play

In this chapter, I return to the third research objective: to gather children's perspectives on play through the method of drawing. Accordingly, Chapter 6 focuses on the outcomes of my 4-step approach to the semiotic analysis of children's drawings. This will be presented as a discussion of children's perspectives on play as revealed through their drawings and drawing process. The chapter covers themes such as children's conceptualisations of play, and significant aspects of play for the child such as toys, play partners and social interaction.

#### Chapter 7: Reflecting on the Benefits and Drawbacks of Using Drawing as a Research Tool for Accessing Children's Perspectives: Findings from the Study

Based on empirical findings, this chapter discusses the benefits of drawing in terms of being an engaging activity, effective communicative device, and its practicalities as a research tool. The chapter also highlights several key factors identified in the study which need to be considered when using drawing as a method of gathering children's perspectives. I address social and contextual factors and issues regarding the use of visual data as the basis for constructing children's perspectives.

#### Chapter 8: Discussion

This chapter discusses some key points from the research findings. Accordingly, I re-examine the central issues identified in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, and consider the wider implications for research practice when using children's drawings as a research tool. I address issues such as using particular methodological approaches for data collection, the task of representing abstract topics, and the wider implications of prompting children to draw. I also demonstrate the originality of research findings, reflect on possible limitations of the study, and provide suggestions for areas of further investigation.

## **CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Introduction**

The objective of this literature review is three-fold. Firstly, it provides a summary and critique of studies using children's drawings as a research tool for accessing children's perspectives, covering themes such as methodological approaches, the subjects children were asked to draw and approaches to interpretation. This sets a wider context for my research, illustrating how it fits into the existing literature on the use of children's drawings. Secondly, the review draws on the literature to elucidate the complexities of analysing children's drawings while maintaining qualitative research principles in terms of privileging and valuing meanings which children have themselves ascribed to their representations. And finally, the review highlights gaps in the literature, demonstrating the need for further studies examining issues surrounding the use of drawing as a research tool such as drawing prompts, techniques and approaches for interpretation and analysis, and its use with preschool children in the context of the home. This provides both the rationale for my study and the generation of the three research questions outlined in section 1.3.

I begin the chapter with a brief historical account of literature pertaining to children's drawings. I outline some of the earliest and most influential works which prompted great interest in the value and significance of children's drawings. In order to contextualise my sample in terms of typical drawing abilities and representations, I briefly outline the most prominent theories of children's drawing development.

I then explore how the use and value of drawings has changed over time and across disciplines: from children's drawings providing a measure for development and cognitive abilities, to their use as communicative devices through which children express thoughts, ideas and perspectives on various subjects. Following this general review, I will highlight key studies which will develop the case for my research, illustrating the necessity for critical discussion regarding theoretical and methodological approaches to using drawings as data, as a method of communication, and as representations of children's perspectives. Here, I present a brief review of Gunther Kress's work with a specific focus on social semiotics and drawings as multimodal communication.

I am aware that I have not included all empirical research involving the use of drawings with children. This is based on two factors: (i) the lack of detail in a number of articles meant that information regarding methodology was simply too superficial to offer any information which could benefit or develop future application of the method, and (ii) my focus for the review was to examine the use of drawing as a method of gathering children's perspectives rather than using drawing to explore cognitive abilities or drawing skills. Therefore, studies which did not use the method to gather the child's views on particular topics were not included. In addition, I do not discuss the place of drawing within the context of school or within the school curriculum. The main reason for this is that my focus is on preschool children as well as the role of drawing as a research tool rather than its role in children's learning. Although the focus of my study is the use of drawing with preschool children, due to the restricted literature relating specifically to this age group, I draw on the wider literature concerning children's drawings as a method for gathering their perspectives.

## 2.2. Children's drawings and research

Children's drawings have been studied, analysed and catalogued for over 150 years. Some of the earliest publications on the value and creative significance of children's artwork were by figures such as Swiss caricaturist, author and pedagogue, Rudolph Topffer (1848)<sup>2</sup>(Cited by Korzenik, 1995), and appearing in the investigations of English naturalist, Charles Darwin (1877). One of the most significant works during this time was by Italian philosopher and poet, Corrado Ricci (1887). Ricci published a seminal booklet on his studies of children's art: '*L'arte dei bambini*' (The Art of Little Children). His work is the earliest documentation of developmental approaches to children's human figure drawings and prompted a surge in interest in children's artwork. To this day, his work remains an important contribution to research on children's drawings (Cox, 1992). Others followed such as James Sully (1895) who wrote a comprehensive account of children's drawing development in his 'Studies of Childhood', who led the way for well-known figures in the field of children's drawings such as Luquet (1927), then the likes of contemporary theorists such as, Arnheim (1974), Cox (1992; Cox, 2005b), Freeman (1980), Kellogg (1970; Kellogg, 1979), and Thomas and Silk (1990).

### 2.2.1. Children's drawing development

Most early as well as current commentaries describe children's drawing development as it progresses through set patterns according to children's age. One of the most

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<sup>2</sup> Topffer's views were of critical value during these times, as he was one of the few scholars of this time to avoid the evaluation of children's drawings against adult drawing standards (Korzenik, 1995).

influential of these developmental theories was Luquet's 'Stage Theory' which was then incorporated by Piaget into stages of child development (Luquet, 1927; Piaget & Inhelder, 1956; Piaget & Inhelder, 1971). Luquet proposed that children progress through four stages of realism: eventually developing from drawing what they know (intellectual realism) to drawing what they see (visual realism). From the ages of two to three years, children are at the *scribbling* stage. Luquet describes this stage as *fortuitous realism*. Here, the child progresses through random scribbling to more purposeful scribbling where they notice the relationship between lines, shapes and marks. The second stage is what is termed *failed realism*, which appears around the ages of four to five. Here, one can see children's first representational attempts. The third stage is described as *intellectual realism*, also known as the stage where children draw what they know rather than what they perceive. For example, if a cup was positioned in front of the child with its handle out of sight, the child would draw the cup with a visible handle.

Between the ages of seven to nine, Luquet describes how children develop from intellectual realism to visual realism. Visual realism is a significant stage of artistic development as the child begins to draw true to what they see. Referring back to the earlier example of drawing a cup, the child would now draw the cup without a handle, even though they know that one exists but is, at the time, out of view. Consequently, children produce more visually realistic representations.

However, these stages of drawing development have been criticised. Writers such as Freeman (1980) suggested the stage theory to be too strict. It is argued that Luquet's stages do not occur independently, but rather in an overlapping progression (Roland, 2006). Consequently, children regress, combine, and enter into sub-stages where

drawings demonstrate the characteristics of more than one stage. One such sub-stage is described as a pre-schematic stage. Here, children begin to combine the circular forms and scribbles to construct more recognisable representations. For instance, young children begin drawing circular shapes with lines as appendages to create their first identifiable human figures (Golomb, 2004). These early human figure drawings are also known as ‘tadpole’ drawings on account of their tadpole like form (Figure 2.1).

Other authors such as Cox (2005b) and Davis (1983) express the need to take account of the decontextualized research tasks the Stage Theory was based upon. In other words, if the same drawing tasks were carried out within a meaningful context and with the presentation of less ambiguous tasks, children would understand what was being asked of them. Other studies demonstrate that particular stages, such as the change from intellectual to visual realism, are not solely applicable to young children as adults have also been shown to draw what they know rather than what they see (Cohen & Bennett, 1997). Visual realism is still conventionally considered a higher level of drawing competency, although some authors and artists challenge this. Instead, they believe it is simply a step toward cultural preference in representation rather than a reflection of drawing skills or cognitive understandings. Cox (2005a) reinforces the fact that although there are general trends



**Figure 2.1:** Eva’s drawing age two to three demonstrating a common approach to the representation of human figures during the pre-symbolic stage of drawing development. This is most often the first recognisable object a child will draw.

which can be observed in children's drawing development, it is difficult to confirm a systematic progression of stages. She also suggests that Luquet's stage theory was not to be interpreted as a linear progression of maturation.

### ***2.2.2. The preschool child and drawing***

Based on the standard stages of artistic development, the preschool child is at the beginning of the pre-schematic stage where the first recognisable representations appear: modifying and refining these to produce drawings with intent and meaning.

By the end of their third year, various "aggregations"—combined forms—often appear, like sun shapes, or circles divided into quarters or eighths, like a pie, which is called a mandala. Eventually these symbols will relate to real things with which children are already familiar. For example, a child may use mandalas in the windows of his house. (Wright, 2003:114)

At the age of four years, the preschool child can draw happy faces (more so than sad ones) as well as using colour as an additional resource to denote emotion (Cox, 2005b). Fine motor skills are refined enabling them to hold a pencil well and be able to copy or even write their names. However, as with child development, artistic development will be different for every child. In addition, Cox reminds us that young children's drawings tend to be 'fairly minimal, depicting only a few features necessary for suggesting the object' (1992:23).

Anning's work on the roles of significant adults in children's drawing practices drew attention to the, 'contrasting cultures of home and school' (2002:207). In the context of school, drawing was primarily a seat-based activity, and not considered 'proper work' but rather a time-filler. Based on these observations as well as supporting literature by

the likes of Cox and others, I chose to focus on preschool children who have not yet been exposed to drawing practice in formal school contexts. Instead, I explore drawing in the home context which can be considered a more unrestricted environment for children to draw. In the home, children can create whatever and whenever they want according to their own agendas and own levels of engagement (Anning, 2002).

Although children use a range of visual methods and other modes of communication in today's growing digital and multimodal culture, studies show that preschool children still use traditional tools such as drawing, engaging in the activity at least once a week (Yamada-Rice, 2010).

### **2.3. Gender differences in children's drawings**

During children's preschool years, research has demonstrated the existence of gender difference in artistic production and preferences (Boyatzis & Eades, 1999; Wright, 2010). There are strong gender differences in children's drawing content preferences, style, and subject matter and children of the same sex are more likely to draw the same topics (Flannery & Watson, 1995; Tuman, 1999). Gardner's (1982) observations revealed that preschool age boys would often fixate on particular fictitious characters from popular culture which would then dominate their artistic expressions. In addition, studies have shown that boys' drawings tend to include fantasy characters, mobile objects and action scenes, as well as exhibiting a low frequency of human figures or tranquil scenes (Iijima *et al.*, 2001; Tuman, 1999; Wright, 2010).

Girls often take an autobiographical approach in drawings representing everyday experiences. Therefore, drawings tend to include people, flowers, small animals and

pets (Gardner, 1982). In contrast, boys had a tendency to represent that which existed far out-with their everyday experiences: drawing more violent, aggressive and fantasy themes. These findings are supported by more recent studies such as Picard and Gauthier (2012), Golomb (2004), and Boyatzis and Albertini (2000).

Preschool boys have been shown to excel at single-medium tasks rather than showing proficiency in the use of mixed media as evident in girls' drawing practice (Gardner, 1982). In addition, a study by Iijima et al. (2001) identified significant sex differences in motif and colour choice of 150 five- to six- year-old children. Their findings showed that boys used colder or darker colours and fewer colours in general. On the other hand, girls used lighter, warmer colours and a higher number of them for representations.

There are a range of theories as to why children's drawings exhibit gender differences. For instance, some studies suggest these arise from psycho-cultural differences such as gender-related education and social pressures to conform with gender stereotypes (Flannery & Watson, 1995). Other studies develop this by demonstrating how children's drawing preferences reflect popular images in the mass media (Cox, 2005). As a result, drawings reflect idealised images and themes of each gender.

Despite the gender differences in artistic expression and practice some studies suggest that, at times, researchers ignore these issues when working with preschool children because their drawings are more difficult to identify as distinct representations. As a result, researchers often miss any expression of gender difference because a greater sensitivity is required to identify subtle differences such as use of colour and organic shapes (Boyatzis & Eades, 1999:275). In addition, Picard and Boulhais (2011) stress

that an extensive amount of research has focused on sex differences in school-aged children's representational drawings rather than children in preschool.

#### **2.4. The widespread use of children's drawings in research**

As described in section 2.2, for over a century, drawings have been used extensively as a research tool for studying the child. Some authors have argued that

Drawing was particularly amenable to study because it was behaviour that left a trace, a record that could be analyzed long after its production. (Korzenik, 1995:17)

For this reason, drawings have been used extensively as projective measures for assessing intelligence, psychological disorders, emotion, cognitive abilities, and learning. Examples include the work of: Barlow et al. (2003); Burkitt, Barrett and Davis (2005); Davis and Bentley (1984); Bruck, Melnyk and Ceci (2000); Goodenough's (1926) 'Draw-a-Man' test to assess intellectual maturity which was later revised and adapted by Harris (1963) and Koppitz (1968). Many of these studies applied drawings using structured methodologies where variables were tightly controlled, drawings would be commissioned by a researcher using a specific command, and there would possibly be a pre- and post-test format for drawing such as those used by Cainey et al. (2012) examining four- to eleven-year-old children's informal learning. These approaches often involved analytical techniques based on scoring systems such as Likert scales, and may have involved predetermined baselines whereby a child could be classified on a relevant scale to identify levels of development and abilities.

Alternatively, drawings can be used in a very informal manner with flexible and unstructured approaches. For instance, Phillips' (2011) study involved observing and collecting children's spontaneous drawings to explore learning with grandparents within the family home. Ring (2006) also adopted child-led approaches to explore everyday routines and rituals and their impact upon young children's use of drawing for meaning-making. Some studies such as Lehman-Frisch et al. (2012) who explored nine- to ten- year-olds' ideas about their communities, purposefully articulate the flexibility of their research design and methodologies. They described the reasoning for their prompt question, 'Draw me your neighbourhood', emphasising that

This wording, deliberately open, aimed to leave each child the choice of the type and content of his graphic representation. One child asked if it meant making a map or drawing a picture, and we replied to the whole class that it was their choice.

(Ibid, 2012:20)

Children's drawings are used routinely within many different disciplines and by various professional groups such as paediatricians, therapists, teachers and forensic psychologists. The attractiveness of using drawings as a research tool may be attributable to their simplicity of administration as well as the activity being considered part of most children's daily repertoires. Other studies suggest that reporting the contents of a drawing is seen as less threatening than verbal feedback from direct events or emotions (Miller *et al.*, 1987).

Cox (2005b:240) emphasises another important benefit that the method offers in that, 'drawings are not overly dependent on language'. This is further reinforced by the fact that drawing is often used in ethnographic and anthropological work in countries where children do not speak English or it is not their first language (Camfield, 2010; Gold &

Gujar, 1994; Veale, 2005; Woodhead, 1998). I would argue that although language is not essential for the production of drawings, language *is* an indispensable component for their interpretation and understanding. Drawings are situated in a particular society, particular time, and created within a particular context. For this reason, researchers need a reflexive approach to consider various factors which influence what, and how, children draw. These may in turn affect the meanings of representations and impact how we interpret drawings as representations of children's perspectives. If we fail to utilise the narratives generated from the process of drawing, then the meanings we interpret from visual representations may result in inaccurate accounts of children's intended messages. As Hall reminds us

An important issue in the analysis or assessment of young children's drawings is that they do not always 'conform' to adults' expectations and can be easily misinterpreted. (2009:187)

For this reason, there is still considerable discussion throughout drawing literature about the level of interpretation possible or acceptable. Some researchers conclude that within a clinical context drawings are best reserved as a focus or prompt for discussion rather than a diagnostic tool (Thomas & Jolley, 1998). Drawings as applied in clinical settings are most often used in informal ways such as ice-breaker activities and always in conjunction with other techniques such as observations, assessments, and self-reports (Driessnack, 2005; Flanagan & Motta, 2007; Veale, 2005; Veltman & Browne, 2002). Greene and Hill (2005:15) argue that many traditional methods and methodologies have been 'developed within the traditional positivist model' and 'speak to the isolated child in a fixed and universalised context'. Therefore, when we consider the use of drawings to access children's views and experiences, we must question whether the same methodologies and approaches are appropriate.

### **2.5. Drawing as a method of gathering children's perspectives**

Our approaches to conducting research with children as well as the ethics involved are embedded within our understanding of children and the concept of childhood (Farrell, 2005). During the late nineties, James and Prout's influential publication of collected papers addressed key issues regarding concepts of childhood such as children's needs, children's rights, and the historical position of children in society (James & Prout, 1997). This had important implications for research practice. Researchers began to consider children as autonomous individuals who were seen as significant contributors to their own experiences as well as having the right to be part of decisions regarding policy and practice (Mayall, 2002). Children can offer valuable contributions in areas which directly affect them (such as pedagogic settings), and have important roles within the development and evaluation of health care procedures, clinical approaches and forensic practice (Bruck *et al.*, 2000; Harrison *et al.*, 2007; Pridmore & Lansdown, 1997; Rollins, 2005). Accordingly, researchers seek children's subjective personal accounts to access the ways in which they experience the world.

So how did these theoretical and epistemological changes affect the ways in which researchers use children's drawings?

With the reconceptualization of childhood, methods must respect and acknowledge the child's rights as an active agent (Corsaro, 1997; James & Prout, 1997). For this reason, across all disciplines of research, there has been a significant shift in eliciting opinion directly *from* the child, rather than simply gathering knowledge about them. Research is therefore driven by a more holistic and contextualised approach to childhood and children's lived experiences. Consequently, research settings embedded in real-life

contexts and conditions such as classrooms, children's homes and play settings have substituted formal approaches to data collection such as tests and laboratory-based drawing contexts.

These theoretical and epistemological changes also prompted scholars to examine research practice with children through a critical lens, along with the methodological issues relating to the use of children's drawings. Fargas-Malet et al. (2010) provide a critical review of research with children. They address a variety of methodological and ethical issues while reviewing techniques used to elicit children's views: one of which is the method of drawing. The study summarises the benefits and drawbacks of drawing and provides examples of how it has been used in research with children. An important point raised in their discussion of drawing, and most relevant to my own research, is that researchers have tended to focus on understanding children's drawings from an adult's perspective rather than endeavouring to understand them from children's own descriptions and explanations.

A number of other reviews raise similar methodological concerns. For example, Hill (1997a) provides a review on participatory methods used in research with children including a small section specifically covering drawing. A more recent review by Waller and Bitou (2011) raised a number of issues regarding participatory approaches with young children and questioned whether they do in fact encourage participation, let alone meaningful participation. They emphasised that issues of ethics and power remain a significant obstacle within children's participation. Similar issues are raised by Kirk (2007) albeit, with a focus on the implications for nursing research. In her literature review on conducting qualitative research with children and young people she concludes that there are two primary methodological concerns: the heterogeneity of

childhood and the existing issues pertaining to cultures of adulthood and childhood. I consider both of these issues in Chapter 3 and discuss how these are relevant to my own research. She also identifies important ethical issues which are a significant aspect of my study: confidentiality, consent, and power relations between child participants and adult researchers. Alternatively, Harrison (2002) provided a more specific review on the use of visual methodologies within the sociology of health and illness. A multitude of visual methods are discussed including their advantages and particular challenges. She concludes that, ‘visual worlds are themselves unique topics of sociological study’ (2002: 856). I draw on this idea throughout the findings and discussion and demonstrate how drawings are indeed unique tools and representations of children’s perspectives.

These various studies benefit the researcher by providing insight into working with children and offer general reviews of useful methods. Nonetheless, these are not written to provide a guide for researchers when using drawings as a research tool for accessing young children’s perspectives.

There are a number of studies which provide discussion of more specific methodologies and techniques for using drawings as a research tool. For instance, Clark (2005) provides a comprehensive review of research methods and methodologies for gathering young children’s (under five years) perspectives in early childhood institutions. The method of drawing is discussed as an art-based activity within her section on ‘multi-sensory approaches.’ This is later followed by a re-examination of these issues (Clark, 2011), where she reflects on her original Mosaic approach. The Mosaic framework is a well-known methodology for incorporating children’s drawings as well as an abundance of other methods that exist in the child’s repertoire, such as play, story-

telling, writing and talking, to create a ‘mosaic’ of the child’s experience. Although this is a fruitful approach for carrying out research with children, it is not a methodology specifically catering to or guiding the use of drawings.

Another approach extensively used and favoured by the medical community and health professionals is the ‘draw and write’ technique (Franck *et al.*, 2008; Gibson *et al.*, 2005; Horstman & Bradding, 2002; Knighting *et al.*, 2011; Pridmore & Bendelow, 1995; Pridmore & Lansdown, 1997). However, studies evaluating the technique conclude that although the draw and write approach has many benefits, there are continuing issues regarding the analysis of children’s drawings (Backett-Milburn & McKie, 1999; Horstman *et al.*, 2008; Sewell, 2011). Indeed, many studies do not provide explicit descriptions of analytical techniques. Consequently, the technique can be difficult to apply without further information regarding the interpretation of children’s drawings.

Dockett, Einarsdottir and Perry (2009) consider the ethical and methodological issues arising from their own work with young children. They review their various projects on school transitions, reflecting on the efficacy of using various methods, such as drawings, to elicit young children’s perspectives. The authors raise an important question which is particularly relevant to using drawing data and that is

What control do the children have over what count as data and how these are interpreted? (Ibid 2009: 292)

Barker and Weller (2003:50) reinforce the adult nature of the research process stating that, ‘researchers’ own interpretations are inaccurate adult sensibilities and preconceptions, which can silence or misrepresent the voices of children’. What these authors affirm is that using children’s drawings entails a significant degree of

reflexivity whereby the researcher must critically examine their methodologies and analytical techniques to ensure the data generated by children are preserved.

Many studies have used drawing, directly or indirectly, as a technique to elicit children's thoughts and views on a myriad of subjects, gathering their perspectives which could serve as valuable feedback and insight into how children experience the world. These include topics such as school transitions and teacher relationships (Dockett & Perry, 2005; Harrison *et al.*, 2007), children's understanding and explanations of death (Vlok & de Witt, 2011), beliefs on health and cancer (Bendelow *et al.*, 1996), mother-child relationships or concepts of others (Gillespie, 1994; Weber *et al.*, 1996), loneliness (Misailidi *et al.*, 2012), competition in preschool (Sheridan & Williams, 2006), children's perspectives on ICT (Denham, 1993; Selwyn *et al.*, 2009), and children's understanding of televised toy commercials (Griffiths, 2005).

I define *direct* approaches as methodologies which involve either a discussion relating to a particular topic which the child must then draw; alternatively children are invited to draw via a specific prompt question. For example, in Hopperstad (2010) children were provided with white A4 paper, crayons and colour pencils and asked, 'Now I want you to draw something from the story you have been listening to'. Children may also be requested to draw in or following interviews (Barker & Weller, 2003; Ceglowski & Bacigalupa, 2007; Miles, 2000; Reiss *et al.*, 2007; Sartain *et al.*, 2000; Sheridan & Williams, 2006). Alternatively, drawings can be directly elicited by means of a specific prompt question, designed to invite the child to produce a drawing on a particular subject. This approach was used by Alerby (2000) where children sat in groups around the classroom and were asked, 'What do you think about when you hear the word environment?' They would then draw their visualisations. Another example is

Harrison et al. (2007) who explored teacher relationships and school adjustment, using the prompt question, 'Draw a picture of you and your teacher at school'. This was a more direct and concrete question used to elicit children's drawings on the subject.

In contrast, *indirect* use of drawings to access children's perspectives would include approaches where drawings are gathered by proxy, or the child may be asked to draw some pictures. For instance, no specific prompt is given, thus obtaining children's spontaneous drawings. This may take the form of scrapbooks (Anning, 2002; Wood & Hall, 2011) or using found images such as historical artefacts, graffiti, or previous school art work. The researcher would then examine these drawings for the presence of particular subject matter or concepts relating to the topic of their inquiry. The benefit of this approach is that children are free to draw according to their own agendas. However, the challenge faced by the researcher is that the topics and content of drawings cannot be controlled or foreseen.

One important aspect of using the method of drawing that warrants further examination is the matter of representing abstract concepts. Many studies ask children to draw abstract concepts such as: the environment (Alerby, 2000); headache and pain (Stafstrom *et al.*, 2002); health (Pridmore & Lansdown, 1997); poverty (Camfield, 2010); punishment (Beazley *et al.*, 2005); knowledge of the Earth and process of learning astronomy (Hannust & Kikas, 2007); God (De Roos, 2006). Researchers may choose drawing as a method for expressing abstract topics because of concerns pertaining to young children's abilities to articulate these views verbally. However, abstract topics may be difficult to represent regardless of the method. For instance, Buldu (2006) conducted a study with children aged five to eight years exploring their perceptions of scientists. The authors elicited children's drawings by giving them the

following instructions, ‘Will you please draw a picture of a scientist doing science? When you are finished, will you please explain your drawing? What do the scientists do?’ Science is a broad and abstract topic which may be challenging for young children to define using any mode of communication. Another study exploring an abstract topic was by Kortessluoma et al. (2008) who investigated hospitalised children’s expression of pain through drawings. The children (aged five to eleven years) were asked to, ‘Please draw a picture that shows a lot of pain and tell about what you have depicted’. In this example, we can envisage the potential challenges of *drawing* pain, in particular, ‘*a lot*’, of pain.

Collins et al. (1998:127) discussed some of the methodological issues arising from studying the abstract topic of preschool children’s awareness of the need of sun protection:

In the early sessions, the researcher asked the children to draw and talk about “keeping safe at the seaside”. It became apparent that this was too open-ended when several children drew and talked about guns and baddies.

What these observations suggest is that the complexity of drawing something may be dictated by the subject. For instance, whether the concept is abstract such as, ‘*keeping safe at the seaside*’, or concrete, ‘Draw something you take to the seaside’, as well as the ways in which we invite children to draw. Although the authors suggest the initial question was too open-ended, even specific questioning with concrete concepts can be open to alternative interpretations. For example, ‘something you take to the seaside’ may take the form of a sun hat, a ball, or sandwiches.

With these examples in mind, an important aspect of my research was to explore the task of representing abstract concepts as static visual representations and so children were requested to draw pictures relating to play. Meire (2007:39) describes

When play is explicitly conceptualised or theorized, it is often remarked that play is extremely elusive.

Indeed, play is a topic which has been disputed over many years with no current consensus:

When it comes to making theoretical statements about what play is...there is little agreement among us, and much ambiguity. (Sutton-Smith, 1997:1)

Even in the current literature pertaining to play, there is still great debate over how play should be defined and understood, as well as on-going disputes regarding the value, purpose and categorisation of various aspects of children's play (Davey & Lundy, 2011; Wood, 2010). However, with consideration to my UK sample, play is a large part of children's daily lives. Therefore, it will provide a familiar and meaningful task to explore the use of drawing as a tool for gathering children's perspectives on abstract topics. I provide an overview of literature on play at the beginning of Chapter 6 where I discuss children's perspectives on play as revealed by their drawings.

## **2.6. Using drawing as a research tool for gathering preschool children's perspectives**

The popularity of drawings seems to arise from strong disinclinations to use adult-orientated techniques, such as interviews and questionnaires, with children due to concern over potential issues regarding comprehension and abilities. Some children

may feel intimidated by the prospect of one-to-one conversations with an adult in the absence of any activities. Therefore, more appropriate approaches are considered to be those which involve more interactive, activity-based methods.

Pelander, Lehtonen and Leino-Kilpi (2007) explored children's perceptions of the ideal hospital. The children were all patients at the hospital, aged four to eleven years old. The study used two different questions to prompt children's drawings: (i) 'What do you think the ideal hospital for children should look like?' And (ii) 'Who or what would you like to be at the ideal hospital for children?' An inductive qualitative content analysis was performed on the 35 drawings collected from children. The authors noted an important outcome of using the method of drawing: the tendency for children's representations to reflect more physical aspects of a hospital setting as opposed to other elements such as interaction between nurses which they determined as being more difficult to draw. Their observations suggest that we need to acknowledge the challenges of drawing abstract concepts and complex ideas such as feelings, relationships or other aspects of children's experiences. These are not tangible objects which can be seen and copied from reality.

In contrast, Ceglowski et al. (2007) used drawing as a supplementary technique as part of a multiple method approach investigating the quality of child care. The authors state that drawing was used specifically for the purpose of facilitating children's expression of ideas and views due to concern that young children may lack the verbal skills to adequately capture or express their thoughts. Children were asked questions such as: 'What do you like to do in child care? What don't you like to do? Tell me about what you did in child care today?' There was no in-depth analysis carried out on the drawings. Instead they were assigned to the major themes which had been identified

through coding transcripts and grouping these codes into larger themes. Both of these studies demonstrate the ways in which drawing may enrich as well as limit children's expression of meaning.

The draw and write technique is often used with children in hospital and clinical settings. A study by Franck et al. (2008) used this approach to explore children's views (aged four to sixteen) on pain relief. A similar study by Stafstrom, Rostasy and Minster (2002) used drawings as aids to diagnose children's headaches. Despite the participants being defined as children, there was a wide range of ages within their definition with the youngest being four years old and the oldest participant being twenty-nine. In one respect the study appeared to encourage the child's own perspectives as the article clearly stated that the researchers asked no leading questions to minimise bias. Yet, the child was given one piece of blank paper, a pencil and an eraser which did not necessarily encourage the freedom of expression which drawing can offer when a variety of materials are provided (Malchiodi, 1998).

Another study by Collins et al. (1998) modified the draw and write technique to use with younger children. They indicated that the choice of a 'draw and talk' strategy had both great benefits and created challenges. The primary strength of this technique was the fact that the researchers wanted to offer another mode of expression as 'It had been anticipated that not all three and four year old children would be able to draw a picture' (Ibid: 127). However, the fact that the children were in small groups during drawing activities meant that there was significant peer influence on account of the descriptions verbalised during the 'Talk' aspect of the strategy.

Another study which raised similar concerns was Gibson, Richardson, Hey, Horstman and O'Leary (2005). This study explored children's views on care and support during

cancer treatment. The research involved three different approaches to data collection: interviews, the draw and write technique, and a play-and-puppets activity. The sample included children from four to nineteen years old. Interestingly they chose not to use the drawing activity with the four- to five- year-olds, but rather another method: play and puppets. The rationale for using puppets was for the researcher to enter a world with which children were familiar and to encourage them to talk about their experiences. Although the authors state that all the methods engaged participants, they mention that some of the younger children had articulated that the puppets were 'babyish'. Understandably, the draw and write technique may not be the first choice when working with preschool children owing to the writing element of the approach. However, this could be adapted as a draw-talk-and-write where children could verbalise their meanings and a parent or researcher could act as a scribe.

So why have I not used a draw and write (or talk) technique? I did not want to constrain or guide the child to express their perspectives in particular modes. If the child wanted to write on the paper provided, they were free to do this, as well as any other form of expression such as verbal labelling, dance, song, sound-effects, or narration. Draw and write suggests a structured and possibly more restricted approach which places a demand on the participant to 'write'. Alternatively, the draw and talk technique presumes that the participant will talk. For those familiar with working alongside young children, one can neither guarantee that children will draw, write, or talk, so it seemed more fitting to leave methods of communication open to children's own preferences.

One of the few examples of researchers using children's spontaneous free drawings is demonstrated in a study by Coates (2002). Not only are free drawings used rather than prompted ones, but the researcher is also present during their production. In this

instance, the focus is on the significance of children's free drawings and the stories and symbolism shown throughout the process of their creation. This study is of great relevance as it involves children aged three to seven and is one of the few that looks at preschool children, as well as its unique focus being on children's spontaneous rather than prompted drawings. However, the one drawback of employing an approach which focuses solely on children's spontaneous drawings is that the researcher cannot foresee the content of children's drawings. This would make it difficult when exploring a specific topic.

There are a few notable studies which use and encourage a child-led research approach and attempt to access young children's perspectives on contexts, professionals, and services which directly impact their lives. These studies cover topics such as: the 'Starting school' project which explored school transition (Dockett & Perry, 2004; Dockett & Perry, 2005), quality in preschool (Einarsdottir, 2005), exploring children's perspectives of the drawing process (Pillar, 1998), and Holliday et al. (2009) who explored the perspectives of young children (aged four to six) with communication impairments. These latter authors suggest that, 'drawing may be an appropriate non-verbal method for 'listening' to these children's ideas and recording their perspectives' (Ibid, 2009:245). Therefore, drawing was beneficial in two ways: as a means of facilitating and supporting communication with children, and as an effective tool to document their perspectives as visual representations.

Golia, Vamvakidou and Traianou (2009) looked at the significance of Homeland to kindergarten children. They collected 146 drawings from kindergarten, P1 and P2 children. The study involved asking children to paint Homeland. Despite the authors describing the task as painting the topic, the resulting data were actually drawings

produced with felt-pens. The drawings were interpreted using semiotics analysis and quantitative techniques. Firstly, the authors distinguish three semiotic fields: syntactic, semantic, and realistic, then identified thematic categories across the data. This was followed by a number of quantitative analytical techniques to examine whether thematic categories differed between gender and development stage. Despite their use of semiotic analysis, their technique was not made explicit and so it was unclear as to how it could be replicated in my own study.

Tanner's study (2010) used drawings as one of many methods to explore child-led responses on climate and natural disasters in El Salvador and Philippines. Their methods were greatly influenced by the sensitivity of the topics and participants (ranging from three to eighteen years). Some methods were based on established activities for vulnerability and capacity assessment, and others included video, games, flow diagrams, and drawings. In addition, a greater range of methods may have been included to cater for the broad age range.

Another study which included a diverse sample age was Soanes et al. (2009). They examined the experiences of children with brain tumours and their parents. This was a one year longitudinal study involving children aged four to thirteen years. They used a variety of methodological approaches, applying techniques according to age group as deemed appropriate. For instance, an adapted Mosaic approach (Clark & Moss, 2001) was used with children aged four to six years.

From my literature review of studies using drawing as a tool to access children's perspectives, a minimal number were carried out in the child's home; and even fewer when focusing on studies with preschool aged children. This suggests that the home

may be a less researched context, despite it being a familiar and comfortable environment for participants.

### **2.7. Drawing as meaning-making: implications for research methodologies and analysis**

Many studies have explored children's meaning-making and drawing (Brooks, 2009; Coates, 2002; Cote & Golbeck, 2007; Cox, 2005a; Dockett & Perry, 2005; Driessnack, 2006). Others such as Worthington (2010) and Wright (2010) champion the work of both Vygotsky and Kress as providing knowledge and frameworks for exploring children's meaning-making.

In early childhood literature, many authors refer to children's 'meaning-making'. Therefore, it is important to define meaning-making within the context of this study and social semiotics because of its widespread use and definitions. Indeed, the term is used extensively to mean or refer to different aspects of constructing, as well as conveying, knowledge and meaning. For example, Kress suggests that children are *always* making meaning. However, others argue that certain circumstances, such as activities which are predominantly adult-led, provide little scope for children's meaning-making (Ring, 2006). This suggests that making meaning and meaning-making are often used interchangeably to refer to similar processes as well as defining different aspects of children's meaning-making practices. Some authors exploring children's literacy suggest using terminologies such as comprehension, understanding, and meaning-making in reference to the same concepts (Dooley, 2011).

From a developmental perspective, meaning-making is an important part of understanding how children make sense of the world and construct meaning. Wright (2003:114) describes how

Between approximately eighteen months and three years of age, nearly everything assumes meaning to the child....through interaction with others, and through the exploration of objects and events.

Meaning-making is viewed as an important process in education because it can evidence particular cognitive development in the child. Meaning-making can be used to refer to children's attempts at abstraction, the use of symbol systems, and describe how children make sense of the world (Brooks, 2009; Cox, 1992; Matthews, 1999). Furthermore, it has been argued that children's multimodal meaning-making

Increases children's capacity to use many forms of representational thinking and to mentally manipulate and organise images, ideas and feelings. (Wright, 2007:38)

The term meaning-making is used frequently in constructivist approaches to education because from this perspective, meaning is considered as being constructed from knowledge. These notions of meaning-making are also often linked to socio-cultural models of understanding the ways in which young children learn. For example, early drawings as a form of meaning-making can be an integral part of young children's learning (Coates, 2002). Children construct meaning from their experiences and for this reason will have their own theories and interpretations of the world. For example, Kendrick and McKay discuss children's meaning-making in the context of literacy construction within Vygotsky's theoretical premises:

The first being that transmission and acquisition of cultural knowledge such as literacy takes place on an interpersonal level between individuals as a precursor to

internalization of such knowledge on an intrapersonal level within the individual. An understanding of this relationship between the individual and the culture enables us to view the children's individual meaning construction as embedded in their social and cultural milieu. Vygotsky's (1978) second formulation...is that of spontaneous concept development. Spontaneous concepts develop from the child's ...personal experiences of literacy, that is, what sense they have constructed of the complex world of literacy in which they are situated. (Kendrick & McKay, 2009:55)

My interest is in children using drawing as a semiotic tool to communicate a particular message. In other words, I am not exploring meaning-making from a developmental perspective in terms of children's construction of knowledge. Instead, a social semiotic approach means that I explore meaning-making as the messages children create in and through drawing(s) in an effort to communicate their perspectives on play. Thus the term meaning-making when related to children drawing is the process of constructing and interpreting signs in order to *convey* children's thoughts, ideas, concepts or opinion (Wright, 2007).

Drawing has been described as an instrument of representation (Freeman, 1980), a cultural resource to share meanings (Cox, 2005a), 'is part of higher mental functions' (Brooks, 2009:18), and something that children use to make sense of the world and their experiences (Matthews, 2003). It is also argued that drawing indicates children's individual thought patterns by externalising concepts, thoughts, and ideas (Pahl, 1999), thus is viewed as an important part of children's meaning-making (Brooks, 2009; Ring, 2006).

In studies exploring children's drawings, the construction and communication of meaning are often used synonymously:

Children draw to create meaning and to communicate this with others. (Wright, 2010:23)

Young children's drawing is part of their playful, meaningful and multi-modal engagement with the world. It supports their ability to hold ideas in the mind and to communicate these ideas with others and with themselves. (Ring, 2010:115)

This suggests multiple processes are occurring at the same time, such as constructing ideas and knowledge, and communicating these through drawing. Therefore, drawing could be used to make meanings of an experience where the child reaches a level of understanding. Alternatively, drawing could be used to make meaning evident in an effort to convey or communicate meaning to another. However, it has been argued that children's early drawings are not created as communication to share thoughts with others. Instead, they are intended for personal reflection (Matthews, 1994). Informed by Vygotsky's notions of 'spontaneous' and 'scientific' concepts, Brooks suggests that

Drawing plays an important role in focusing children's attention on the spontaneous concept as well as allowing them to make connections between concepts. Drawing will often contain and make visible the essence of an idea or concept. When these thoughts or concepts exist outside of the child, the child can then work with the idea in relation to other ideas. Drawing, when used as a medium of exchange, can form a dynamic function that allows an elaboration of an initial idea and the definition of a concept. (Brooks, 2009:19)

Therefore, the concept of meaning-making can refer to drawing as a meaning-making process which does not have to be interpretable by others. Instead, it is to make meaning and sense of experiences and the world for oneself.

Kress (1997) suggests that there are very different requirements in meaning- or sign-making depending on the individual's objectives. For example, communicating meaning is focused on the audience. In comparison, representing a concept or idea focuses on the creator. Consequently, the latter does not necessarily convey meaning which can be interpreted by another. Both have different objectives and requirements regarding sign-making. Kress continues to clarify the distinction whereby

The requirements of *communication* are that the participants in an act of communication should make their messages as understandable for a particular person in a particular situation as it is possible to do. (Kress, 1997:14)

In other words, the objective of sign-making in this instance is to make meaning as transparent as possible so that it can be interpreted by another individual. Whereas

The requirements of *representation* are that I, as the maker of a representation/sign, choose the best, most plausible form for the expression of the meaning that I intend to represent. (Kress, 1997:14-15)

Therefore, young children may deem a drawing successful if it has met their intentions, irrespective of it being recognised by an external observer (Freeman, 1995). Despite this being an important process of meaning-making for the child, within a research context, this can prove challenging when using drawing as a method of accessing children's perspectives.

Meaning-making from a social semiotic perspective requires an awareness of the communicational environment. Therefore, central to Kress's exploration and theorising of children's meaning-making is 'interest' and the 'motivated sign' (Kress, 1997:87).

Thinking about signs as motivated and transformative highlights the continuous social ‘work’ involved in producing and maintaining the conventions of meaning. (Jewitt, 2012:22)

Subsequently, within the research context, where children are being asked to convey their perspectives through drawing, the principle objective is to communicate meaning in order to share ideas and concepts. For this reason, children may choose or attempt to use more conventional representations in order to express meanings in more traditional ‘visual language’ which can be interpreted by an external observer. My focus is on the communication of a particular topic through drawing. In this respect, it would be detrimental to use unconventional or obscure representations as this would risk being misunderstood.

Studies have suggested that drawings alone cannot fully represent the child’s intention or meanings. Cox (2005b) suggests that children’s representations may not be discernible by an external observer if they have not been a part of the drawing process. This may be a result of young children’s tendencies to verbalise their thoughts and ideas while creating the drawing, clarifying the meanings represented by the physical representations on the page (Einarsdottir *et al.*, 2009; Hopperstad, 2008b). Cameron and Clark (2004:496) reinforce these ideas by suggesting that

Researchers may gain more from listening to young children’s talking during the drawing process than from a formal analysis of the final drawing.

This is supported by other studies illustrating how the child’s drawing can be changed, erased and added to during or even after its completion, as well as much of the meaning being expressed in children’s narratives generated throughout the drawing process (Dockett & Perry, 2004; Einarsdottir *et al.*, 2009; Pahl, 1999; Punch, 2002). There are

studies which have been influenced by Kress's work on children's multimodal meaning-making which also acknowledge and value the multimodal nature of the drawing process (Hall, 2009; Hopperstad, 2008a; Hopperstad, 2010; Mavers, 2009; Mavers, 2011).

Two important concerns arise from this discussion. The first is methodological approaches researchers adopt for collecting drawings. The primary concern here relates to researchers' choices of *how* to gather children's drawings. Will the researcher be present during children's drawing practice? Is the process recorded in some way? Or does the researcher obtain drawings through secondary sources such as teachers and parents? These decisions will inevitably have important implications for the types of data that will be available to facilitate researchers' interpretations. Take, for example, studies which use scrapbooks through which drawings are gathered by proxy (Anning, 2002; Wood & Hall, 2011). In these situations, parents, teachers, and grandparents may all play a part in the collection. Researchers may either analyse the data as independent artefacts, or depend on teachers and parents recollections from the original drawing activity. Although seeking parents' or teachers' accounts of the drawing process can provide additional information regarding the drawing context and possibly the child's intentions, this cannot substitute the child's meanings associated with their own drawings. It should be noted, that often when children's drawings are gathered in this manner, drawings are used to study general topics such as 'what children draw' or in Wood and Hall's case 'what children's drawings communicate', or Ring (2006) exploring everyday routines and rituals and their impact upon young children's use of drawing for meaning-making. A similar but *much* earlier study was conducted in 1924 (McCarty, 1924) where thousands of children's drawings were collected with the

purpose being to investigate children's interests as represented through their drawings. Children were simply asked to draw a picture of anything they wanted.

These latter studies use drawings as records of children's general interests, from which the researcher then extracts recurring themes or concepts across a large pool of drawings. In contrast, I am using the method for a more specific purpose: as a tool to access children's perspectives on play. In other words, my research aims to access children's perspectives by directly asking them to express these through the drawing process. The former studies are not attempting to use drawing to access children's perspectives on particular subjects or concepts; but rather, to learn about particular aspects of childhood through what they can find out from children's spontaneous drawings. Consequently, researchers are limited to themes and concepts which typically appear in children's drawings and may not access other important aspects of children's lives simply due to children not drawing these things in the pool of spontaneous drawings.

The second concern arising from these initial discussions relates to our choice of analytical techniques. These will be influenced by the data that we gather or have access to. Gathering drawings directly from children allows the researcher to observe the drawing process while accessing valuable data to inform interpretation. This means that analytical approaches can incorporate and privilege children's signification and interpretation of their representations. Subsequently, the analytical technique must also be applicable to different forms of data such as the visual image, text, transcripts, and children's behaviour. In contrast, a methodology which focuses on the children's final product as independent units of analysis without gathering further information regarding the drawing process, explanations or context of its creation, cannot guarantee

that interpretations will be similar to those resulting from children's own interpretations or meanings ascribed to drawings. It is our responsibility as researchers to develop methods through which we can observe, record, analyse, and interpret the multiplicity of ways a child can convey meaning through drawing. Therefore, it is important to consider how multimodality has developed within the fields of Education, children's learning, and impacted the use of visual methods (Jewitt, 2012; Kress, 1997; Kress, 2010; Mavers, 2011).

### **2.8. Social semiotics and children's multimodal drawing practice**

Influenced by Kress's work on a social semiotic theory of communication, Diane Mavers argues

In research, as in education, great store is put by what children say and write, but there tends to be some apprehension about whether their drawings are a valid and reliable source of information. From a social semiotic perspective, it is not the case of whether writing or drawings is more 'truthful', but that their particular affordances enable certain expressions of meaning. (2009:264)

These new theoretical underpinnings have changed the way in which images are valued, approached, and analysed. Consequently

A major criticism of drawing research that has been carried out in the positivistic tradition is that drawings are analysed in a vacuum: the child and his/her drawing/s are separated and an adult-derived, often quantitative, analytical framework is used to-supposedly-arrive at an objective and valid assessment. Instead, it should be children's voices that highlight any distinctive features and the intentions behind these. (Hall, 2009:187)

These arguments suggest that the changing social and cultural perceptions of childhood have inevitable implications for how children's drawings and children as participants are viewed and valued. Current conceptualisations of childhood suggest that the child should be viewed as an autonomous individual, actively influencing the world around them and thus their views should be sought directly. Children's drawings are now viewed as more than simply measures of ability but as a strategy to access children's perspectives. Children's drawings and drawing process are now valued in their own right with their own unique meanings. The next step of current research approaches is to use suitable analytical techniques to access these meanings.

One significant scholar who has attempted to construct a new theoretical framework to encompass the prominence and dominance of the visual and its multimodal manifestations in our modern societies is Gunther Kress. Kress has been inspired by the works of Michael Halliday, who views language as a form of semiosis embedded in the social rather than independent from the social, as well as Roland Barthes due to his extensive writing on semiotics (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). In terms of the interpretation of visual images, Kress has also been influenced by Rudolf Arnheim from the psychology of art. Although much of Kress's work draws on his theory of social semiotics, each publication has a slightly different focus for its application; developing the theory in different ways and for different purposes in reaction to the cultural shifts of popular means of communication. Kress's other work also focuses on teaching, learning and the influence of his theory on literacy in current contexts of education, as well as the developing culture of interactive multimedia (Bezemer & Kress, 2008; Kress, 2000; Kress, 2003; Kress, 2011).

There are indeed three distinct schools of semiotics: the Prague school (circa 1930-1940); the Paris school during the 1960s and 1970s involving Saussure, Barthes, and known for specific terminologies such as parole, langue, code, signifier and signified, and the ‘motivated sign’; and social semiotics developed by the likes of Halliday (1978). Social semiotics draws from Halliday’s theoretical notion of ‘metafunction’ (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996:40). The three metafunctions are: ‘ideational’ (representing the world), ‘interpersonal’ (enacting social interaction as social relations), and ‘textual’ (the creation of structured meaning to be ‘read’).

### ***2.8.1. The path to ‘reading images’***

Influenced by linguists such as Chomsky and Halliday, Hodge and Kress (1988) introduce us to the theory of social semiotics. The theory itself has developed from a combination of Halliday’s functional linguistics and structural semiotics which develops Ferdinand de Saussure’s linguistic model of systems of codes, the signified, and signifier. The foundation for Hodge and Kress’s theory is that signs and messages are always embedded in the social: created, used and interpreted within the contexts of social processes and social relations. Using a range of examples from television, billboards and educational texts, they illustrate how social semiotics can illuminate key issues in theories of literacy and communication. This book was a significant publication which offered a framework for those interested in analysing and interpreting texts beyond that of traditional concepts of language. The theory attempted to consider texts as structured wholes, beyond that of the written or spoken, and situated in social practices.

In 1996, Kress and van Leeuwen published a seminal book on 'Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design'. Inspired by Halliday's theory of language as a social semiotic, this book provides a comprehensive account of the grammar, and subsequent analysis, of visual design. The authors draw on the rules and structures applied in the grammar of language to construct the reading of visual texts: 'we seek to develop a descriptive framework that can be used as a tool for visual analysis' (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 13-14). The term 'visual design' refers to the formal elements and structures of design such as colour, perspective and composition, which are involved in its use as a communicative device. Kress and van Leeuwen draw on a range of examples such as magazine layouts, posters, textbook illustrations, photos, advertisements and fine art to illustrate how social semiotics can be used to analyse these different forms of visual data. Most of these visual examples are formally designed images, created for specific social purposes using prescribed visual semiotic rules to fulfil specific objectives. For instance, a visual advertisement may connote an idea of power and masculinity in an attempt to encourage men to buy the cologne as they aspire to be that type of male. Indeed, the primary strength of the theory's application may be when the creators' intentions cannot be accessed, thereby offering a method for inferring the meanings of images based on their design. In other words, they are interpreted from the semiotic clues provided by the visual grammar. The terms and categories they use for their analytical framework include: the three overarching metafunctions of the visual image as ideational, textual and interpersonal; narrative representations vs. conceptual representations; modality; and interest. Within the narrative representations, numerous subcategories are used to describe these specific visual images such as conversation process, geometric processes, reactional processes, circumstance, goal, and transactional actions. Conceptual representations are

subdivided into classificational processes and analytical processes. The latter analytical processes are further subdivided into seven distinct types.

For a researcher new to the theory, this is challenging to grasp. The frequent use of specialised terminology and in-depth descriptions of the various elements of visual design leaves the reader with the task of conceiving the theory and analysis as a comprehensive whole. Furthermore, different aspects of visual grammar and different semiotic criteria are applied to different examples. Hence, when applying it to one form of visual data it is difficult to select which are relevant from each separate chapter. Overall, I felt that this presented a challenge when applying the theoretical and analytical framework to visual data which have not been used in their examples.

It is in essence Kress's 1997 publication, 'Before Writing: Rethinking the Paths to Literacy', that served to clarify my theoretical framework and the relevant criteria for analysing and interpreting young children's drawings. The book itself focuses on a social semiotic framework for theorising and understanding children's literacies. This work draws on his earlier theories of language as encompassing all forms of meaning-making and not only written or spoken text.

He argues for a reconceptualization of literacy and language with specific focus on children's meaning-making practices. Kress illustrates the plurality of children's communicative practices through numerous examples such as using cardboard boxes to represent boats or conveying the concept of a car by drawing circles. This book encapsulates my thesis in terms of its social semiotic approach to children's meaning-making and the potential for its use in analysing young children's drawings. He devotes entire chapters to describing and theorising the practice of young children's meaning-making. In Chapter two, 'Making meaning in many media' he describes how

children represent the world they see and experience by creating motivated signs, guided by their interest. In other words

at a particular moment we...act out of a certain interest in the environment in which we are, and that in our making of signs, that interest is reflected in the sign in the best possible way, in the most plausible fashion, in the most apt form.  
(Kress, 1997:19)

In a section titled, 'Multimodality', Kress provides an account of children's meaning-making as multimodal where

Children are...entirely used to 'making' in a number of media; and their approach to meaning-making is shaped and established in that way. Children act multimodally, both in the things they use, the objects they make; and in their engagement of their bodies: there is no separation of body and mind. (Kress, 1997:97)

He describes a modal affordance, where children's meanings will be affected by the modes which they choose, or have available, to make meaning. In other words

If the verbal lends itself more readily to the representation of action and of dynamic events, to representation in the narrative form, does it do so more effectively than drawing does?...If there is a specialization, should we make do with second best - representing classification, analysis in language, and action in images - or should we be prepared to use each medium to the fullest potential?  
(Kress, 1997:137)

This discussion suggests that Kress is questioning whether particular forms of communication are more effective in communicating particular concepts or ideas. This, in essence, reflects the various challenges and criticisms researchers articulated in

section 2.5 and 2.6, when reflecting on the efficacy of drawing as a method of gathering children's perspectives. As discussed, some studies experienced drawing as a tool which facilitates children's expression on account of limited verbal abilities; others articulated concern over the drawing skills required to represent particular views and ideas. Hence, in the latter situation, drawing was not considered the most effective tool. These conflicting accounts of using drawings as a research tool strengthen Kress's theory, illustrating that depending on the meaning children are attempting to convey, drawing may be the most appropriate medium for communication and, at other times, drawing will be inadequate.

The taxonomy of 'multimodality' or 'multimodal texts' is not often used in 'Reading Images', yet, this aspect of social semiotics is being developed throughout the book:

The different modes of representation are not held discretely, separately, as autonomous domains on the brain, or as autonomous communicational resources in a culture, nor are they deployed discretely, either in representation or in communication; rather, they intermesh and interact at all times. (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996:39 - 40)

It is this element of social semiotics that the authors assert as a step towards challenging the notions of language and traditional theories and practices of communication. They describe how language in the form of speech is not only verbal, but also visual. In other words, there is also non-verbal meaning conveyed through body, gaze, gesture and so forth. Indeed, written text is also a form of visual communication as it is the spoken word or thought represented in visual form.

Kress's interest in contemporary forms of literacies and the shifting 'semiotic landscape' prompted 'Literacy in the New Media Age' (2003); a book written seven

years after 'Reading Images'. Kress develops the theories which were introduced in his earlier work and develops the ideas of multi-modal texts, arguing for a concept of literacy which is inclusive of the 'texts' within the current cultural landscape. For example, the shifts from text and print to a digital and on-screen age. He describes the necessity for such theories based on the new dominance of the image and the shifting dominant mediums such as from book to screen. He also stresses the implications for cultural changes in communicative mediums in that meaning is embedded in the message itself. In other words, *how* we choose to represent and convey meaning is in itself part of the meaning. For instance, choosing to draw the sky blue, choosing to use a pencil rather than pen, or using speech to describe the colour of a representation rather than actually colouring it; all contributes to the meaning of the drawing itself. This is because a blue sky suggests a nice day rather than storm or night time scene, and using pencil may imply that the drawing is a draft version, in that the child can erase aspects of the image, rather than being a final product. These are important points to note as they have implications for the conditions and social framing we create for children drawing. Do researchers encourage children's multimodal drawing practices? Do we restrict them? And do we record these other modes of expression to then inform our interpretations and analysis?

Some of Gunther Kress's more recent publications (Kress, 2010; Kress, 2011) reflect his continuing interest in the developing cultural shift from traditional texts to the now more prominent digital and mobile arena. His interests stem from the interrelations of the dominant media of the time and how contemporary texts and changing modes of communication affect the learning and the creation and exchange of knowledge. 'Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication' (Kress, 2010) is an extension of his work on multimodality, developing the theory of

contemporary multimodal ways of communicating. Indeed, early references to the significance of a multimodal theory of communication are suggested throughout his work: from his 1988 book ‘Social Semiotics’ with Robert Hodge, to ‘Before Writing’ in 1997. Although his 2010 book covers many of his previous concepts, terminology and arguments such as mode, modal affordance, social semiotics, as well as using past examples, it also includes additions relevant to technological innovation such as, ‘The social semiotics of convergent mobile devices: new forms of composition and transformation of habitus’ (Kress, 2010:184). Therefore, he relates many of his theoretical points to the current languages of the world and the implication for educational contexts, teachers and learning: using a social semiotic theory to address the multimodality of 21<sup>st</sup> century communication.

So how does this book relate to my interest in the analysis and interpretation of children’s drawings? On page 181 he describes sign-making as learning and offers a brief analysis of two pupils’ drawings, or more specifically, diagrams, of frogspawn. Kress describes how the pupil’s meaning is ‘spread’ across two different modes: in this case, image and text. In its simplest form, mode is a cultural or socially shaped resource used to make meaning evident and material. Kress offers examples of modes such as image, writing, and logos. These modes convey meaning in very different ways and we use them for different purposes. It is here, that the multi-modal becomes important in how we make and convey meaning. Rarely do we communicate using only one mode. Kress argues

If the limitation of one mode of representation *is* a limitation, then we should do everything we can to overcome that limitation. If it is a limitation on the totality of human potential, if it favours one aspect only, to the detriment of others, then we have, I believe, no justifiable reason for sustaining it. (Kress, 1997:29)

Essentially, what Kress is arguing in this extract is that we should not focus on a single and usually culturally dominant mode of communication, if this is fundamentally limiting the meanings we convey. To apply this to children's drawing practice, what this reinforces is that in our interpretations of children's visual images, we should acknowledge the other modes children dynamically use to create visual representations such as colour, materials, accompanying narrative, text, facial expressions and the animated behaviour children demonstrate in an attempt to bring their static images to life.

Indeed, Kress (1997), in a later chapter, compares the various modes available for children's communication, discussing the processes and challenges of conveying meaning in one mode in contrast to another. So the idea here, that choice of mode will inherently affect our, or specifically children's, abilities or potential to convey particular meaning is one we must acknowledge if our objective is to gather rich accounts of children's perspectives.

### ***2.8.2. A social semiotic approach to interpreting children's drawings***

The main aim of social semiotics is 'to look systematically at how textual strategies are deployed to make certain meanings' (Aiello, 2006:90). Social semiotics concentrates on practices of meaning-making and considers how we make meaning using various semiotic resources, modes and their affordances. What is developed by Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) and van Leeuwen and Jewitt (2001) is how we can use social semiotics as an analytical tool to access these meanings by drawing on the contexts and cultures of its production and how we as individuals assign meanings to our texts through our prior knowledge, exposure and use of semiotic resources and modal

affordance in our communicative practices. Therefore, social semiotics allows us to access the meanings which children create through semiosis, embedding their image making or ‘visual design’ within the contexts and cultures of their creation. Iedema (2001:200) suggests that systematically deconstructing text (in whatever form) offers a means of critically analysing meaning thus providing, ‘a means to understand and manipulate what might otherwise remain at the level of vague suspicion and intuitive response’. But how does one know how to ‘deconstruct’ visual texts in a systematic manner if a guided tour is not offered and no example provided using data specific to your own research? When faced with a child’s drawing, which may be as simple as a blue circle, how do we, as researchers, systematically analyse this image, ensuring rigour and validity of our interpretations? Bazalgette and Buckingham (2012) raise a similar point when reviewing multimodal social semiotic approaches to analysis offered by Kress and van Leeuwen

Needless to say, this approach works exceptionally well with the examples Kress and van Leeuwen provide, but as is often the case, attempts to apply the grammar to other examples do not work out so neatly. (Bazalgette & Buckingham, 2012:4)

Other authors such as Iedema (2003:30) raise important analytical issues regarding how we manage data produced by multimodal communication

...multimodal analysis should be complemented with a dynamic view on semiosis. Often oriented to finished and finite texts, multimodal analysis considers the complexity of texts or representations as they are, and less frequently how it is that such constructs come about, or how it is that they transmogrify as (part of larger) dynamic processes...the inevitably *transformative* dynamics of socially situated meaning-making processes require an additional and alternative analytical point of view.

Iedema reinforces the complexity of using social semiotics to analyse drawings due to the situated nature of children's meaning-making process. As a result, the construction and meaning of representations will vary across different social contexts, and to serve different social purposes. One of the main issues regarding examples of social semiotic analysis is that children's motivations and interests are used to *infer* the meaning conveyed through these drawings. In other words, examining the 'visual design' and 'visual grammar' to understand the child's signification rather than basing it on the child's descriptions and explanations of the meanings they are trying to convey. This is an adequate approach if we are examining the ways in which children make meaning through images using the social or semiotic resources available to them; for instance, this could be applied to the scrapbooking methodologies referred to in section 2.7. Nevertheless, difficulties arise when we are using children's drawings as a research tool to explore their perspectives on a particular topic. The main issue of concern is: why base children's meanings on speculation when we can use methodologies and analytical approaches which allow us to gather information during the actual creation of the drawing?

A number of studies use social semiotics to analyse children's drawings. However, whether these interpretations are based on adult speculation or the children's actual descriptions and explanations of their drawing is not necessarily made explicit. For example, Eleftheriou et al. (2012) use social semiotics as an analytical framework in their study. They provide a detailed account of their categories of analysis; however, they do not give an explicit account of the analytical procedure. Consequently, there is little evidence of how these categories of analysis were applied to a child's drawing and used to facilitate their interpretations.

Another study adopting a social semiotic framework is Hopperstad (2010). The study used social semiotics to interpret children's drawings (aged five to six) within a school context by applying Halliday's terminology of ideational, textual, and interpersonal meaning. Many of the descriptors relate specifically to representations of people, and the relationships between human figures and the remainder of the scene or objects. For this reason, it is difficult to replicate her approach to drawings which *do not* contain human figures. She does however reiterate the important contribution of Kress and van Leeuwen, and that is providing researchers with 'an analytical framework within which to "read" and discuss visual meaning' (2010:431). For this reason, social semiotics ought not to be viewed as a fixed template to which all images should fit but rather, a framework or even toolkit which researchers can draw from to analyse children's drawings. The ways in which we apply it will inevitably be dependent upon the questions we want answered and what we hope to explore through children's drawings. Therefore, if my objective is to seek children's perspectives on play through their drawings, then I require an analytical technique which would access this data.

### **2.9. Summary**

This literature review began with a general discussion on the use of children's drawings across disciplines in order to place my study within a wider research context. Examples ranged from studies in medical settings where they use drawing as a technique to identify children's somatic concerns, to the use of drawing as a method of understanding children's learning experiences in school. I then focused my discussion on a selective review of the most relevant studies to my specific area of inquiry. These were: (i) studies that used drawings specifically as a method for gathering children's

perspectives rather than studies which use drawing to assess or measure other aspects of children's lives or abilities such as drawing skill or ability to convey emotion in images, and (ii) studies gathering preschool children's perspectives.

This literature review highlighted continuing developments in social and cultural perceptions of childhood and views of children as participants which suggest the child should be central in the research process. However, we cannot assume that drawing ensures child-centred research. Researchers may view drawing as child-friendly; but this is not the case for every child in every context. The child's cultural context and associated social and communicational practices greatly influence the child's familiarity with the method.

An important outcome of the literature review was the absence of explicit analytical procedures and guidelines for using drawing as a research tool with young children including issues such as whether to use prompted or non-commissioned drawings which essentially led to the rationale for my research.

The study builds on the work of authors such as Einarsdottir, Anning and Ring, Dockett and Perry who have also used drawings as a way of accessing young children's perspectives through their drawing process. From their extensive research, these authors raise a number of important methodological issues pertaining to the use of children's drawings. These authors, as well as others such as Mitchell (2006), support the opportunities offered by drawing as a tool for engaging with, and gathering data from children, while recognising the need for a critical approach to using the method.

I explored the work of Gunther Kress and introduced some of his theories of social semiotics and multimodality as well as the implications for approaches to interpreting children's drawings. My work draws on Kress and van Leeuwen's theoretical

framework. Their theory is used to frame how drawing is viewed in the study: as a semiotic vehicle where messages are created through representation and signification and are always embedded in the social

Therefore, my primary concern is not to challenge the method of drawing as its use across disciplines is diverse. Instead, my objective is to re-examine this long established means of expression, and consider it specifically within its role as a research tool for gathering young children's perspectives on play.

The literature review revealed that many researchers use the method of drawing within educational contexts such as classrooms and nurseries. However, few studies are carried out in the child's home; and even fewer when focusing on studies with preschool aged children. This suggests that the home may be a less researched context, despite it being a familiar and comfortable environment for participants. On account of the sparse research on using drawing as a research method within the context of children's homes, this area of study requires further investigation. Thus, my study was to be carried out in the context of the home rather than an educational setting.

The main gaps in the existing literature were identified as: (i) research that acknowledges children's drawing process in both interpretation and analysis of children's drawings, (ii) accessing preschool children's perspectives on play, (iii) research with preschool children in the context of the family home, and (iv) inquiry into the implications of prompting children to draw.

## **CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter describes the underpinning methodological approaches and principles of my research. The actual methods to be employed will be discussed in Chapter 4 as part of the research design. Here it is important to explain the distinction between methods and methodology as this will explain why I am discussing them in separate chapters. A research method can be described as a research tool or technique employed for the collection and analysis of data. In contrast, the research methodology describes the principles driving the research process. These could be epistemological, theoretical, and philosophical concepts underlying the reasoning and logic behind decisions regarding various aspects of the research process. This provides a framework for structuring and guiding the study.

In this chapter, a number of methodological issues will be discussed. These are: qualitative approaches, subjectivity, reflexivity, the positioning and conceptualisation of children and its implications for research practice, rapport and familiarisation, ethical issues, and theoretical framework. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of the analytical approach to be employed. However, as the analytical technique is a substantive part of the thesis, it warrants its own distinct discussion. For this reason, the method of analysis and its development is presented in Chapter 5.

### 3.2. Research approach

A qualitative approach provides a useful means of addressing research with young children. It allows for a flexible approach where the research process and researcher can adapt and accommodate participants' specific interests, needs and level of engagement (Rogers & Evans, 2008). My objective in regard to the methodology was to allow an organic development of data collection methods; guided by the child's preferences and natural drawing practice rather than adult-led drawing conditions.

The methodology applied in the study can be defined as: qualitative, child-focused, flexible, evolving and reflexive. These will be developed and discussed in the ensuing sections.

Qualitative research is 'an extension of the tools and potentials of social research for understanding the world and producing knowledge about it' (Flick, 2007:7). It has also been characterised as an approach which attempts to learn about and describe social phenomena from the perspective of insiders by giving voice to individuals, and encouraging reflection rather than performance (Lapan *et al.*, 2012:3). Therefore, it can provide rich insight into individuals and groups, and, 'how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences' (Merriam, 2009:5). As the central aim of my research was to access children's perspectives, a qualitative approach was considered most appropriate to facilitate this process. As suggested by the literature, qualitative research is more focused on the meanings, social relations and practices of human beings. This is particularly fitting for my study as the research considers drawing as a social practice and attempts to access the meanings children convey through this communicative tool.

It is argued that qualitative research involves an interpretive approach to the world (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). It consists of a set of interpretive and material practices that make the world visible. They turn the world into a series of representations which some argue, 'provide us with our only access to another's reality' (Silverman, 1983:17). These representations may include field notes, photographs, interviews, conversations, and video recordings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In addition, researchers who adopt a qualitative approach tend to 'study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005:3). This suggests that researchers themselves are considered a vital part of the process. Consequently, reflexivity is another important aspect of qualitative research, as the researcher must consider how they may influence participants, the research context, and how their positioning impacts research practice and outcomes (Flick, 2007).

Qualitative studies can be conducted using a number of different paradigms. These paradigms are also described as guiding sets of practices because the particular epistemological or ontological orientations researchers adopt guide how they envision the study of a particular subject (Schensul, 2012). Schwandt (1989:379) reminds us that various paradigms embody very different assumptions about the world and that

Each model holds a radically different view of the nature of reality, values a different kind of knowledge, and promotes a different set of standards for evaluating knowledge of claims.

Therefore, our positioning as researchers and the research paradigms we choose will shape the tools, knowledge and approaches we consider suitable to achieve this. In my

case, the chosen paradigm will shape how I explore the use of drawing as a method of gathering young children's perspectives.

The perspective adopted in this research is that the world is not made up of definite realities. Individuals are continually making sense of the world from their own interpretations and their interactions with it (Oliver, 2010). For this reason, the ontological orientation adopted in this research is constructivism. From this perspective, the social world is regarded as something that we are part of, and something which we are always shaping and influencing.

Therefore, children can be considered individuals who are influenced by, and in turn shape, the world around them; inevitably constructing very different ideas and views of the world. These arguments suggest that constructivism 'reflects the indeterminacy of our knowledge of the social world' (Bryman, 2001:19). For this reason, the perspectives I access will be unique to the individual child, the sample, the context, and the meanings they convey through drawings in that specific situation.

I situate my own research within a constructivist paradigm because to some extent this also reflects my social semiotic framework of communication in that cultures and the cultural practices within them, such as language and communication, are always changing and evolving due to human interaction, intervention and influence. From a social semiotic perspective, although we use the practices, signs and meanings which already exist in culture, we also change these over time, transforming what we have available and know to create new meanings. Kress (1997) argues that we, as social human beings, are always making new signs. Thus, meaning is socially constructed and always embedded in social contexts and relations: it varies across different contexts, situations, for different purposes, and in response to different audiences. Therefore

It is not a question of a correlation between an autonomously existing sign, and an external social reality...The sign is fully social, the work of social/semiotic agents expressing their sense of the social world at a particular moment, and of their affective response in it. (Kress, 2001:76)

Interpretivism is based on the premise that humans create their own meaning through experiences as they interact with the world around them (Lapan *et al.*, 2012). There is no single reality which exists. Therefore, what is sought through an interpretivist approach is an in-depth understanding of human beings, their individual experiences, and their multiple realities (Denzin, 2010). Schensul (2012:69) argues that the interpretivist paradigm is ‘driven by the views of those in the study setting’, and takes ‘the position that social or cultural phenomena emerge from the ways in which actors in a setting construct meaning’. For this reason, qualitative researchers tend to immerse themselves in these social settings to observe, record, and learn about individuals within their social contexts. This reflects my research approach in that I carried out participant-led drawing activities, conversations and play in meaningful contexts, within children’s family homes.

At times, the research process could have been described as deductive based on the fact that my research was guided by theory. However, deductive theory is most commonly linked to quantitative research while an inductive strategy is associated with qualitative studies. It is argued that this notion is not so straightforward when examining the strategies and theoretical approaches used in qualitative research studies (Bryman, 2001). For instance, inductive theory typically implies the generation of theory rather than beginning with one which is then tested using empirical data. However, some argue that qualitative research does not always generate theory as its findings (Bryman, 2001:11). Others stress the importance of using theory from the onset of research in

order to avoid being a 'naïve researcher' (Flick, 2007). Based on these arguments, my research approach could be described as an iterative process, where theory, research approaches, and methods evolved throughout the various stages of my research. This iterative process can be further evidenced by the research design as two pilot studies were conducted in order to gather empirical data early in the research process. This allowed me to engage in theoretical reflection, which then fed back into my continuing research process. As a result, there was a continual weaving of theory and data. In addition, I used an existing theory for understanding and interpreting children's drawings and to facilitate the creation of a practical tool for analysis.

### *3.2.1. Subjectivity*

Qualitative approaches rely heavily upon interpretation. From the onset, our understanding of situations, the behaviour of others, and our own records of these observations are based on our interpretations of these events. Many factors play a part in the way we interpret others, and the situations we experience. These factors include gender, life experience, religion, culture, and education (Mukherji & Albon, 2010). So it could be argued that the researcher is continually constructing their own understanding of participants and the meanings conveyed through various data. From this perspective, using qualitative methods as a means of exploring children's social worlds does leave the research open to researcher bias. Due to the potential bias of a subjective research process, it is important to address such concerns early in the research (Greene & Hill, 2005).

Drawing on the constructivist paradigm adopted in this research, it is important to acknowledge that I will have different interpretations of the social world than those of

another researcher. In addition, I may attach particular meaning to social situations and interactions with others based on my own experiences, values and possibly gender or age (Oliver, 2010).

The analysis is partially my own interpretation. For instance, where children did not offer an explanation nor assign meaning to aspects of their drawings, guided by social semiotics (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996), I attempted to interpret the possible meanings conveyed by exploring children's interests and motivations behind their productions. In light of the type of data I am examining, young children's drawings, I acknowledge that these can be complex representations to interpret, and as Rose (2007:xiv) underscores, 'Interpreting images is just that, interpretation'.

Nagel's work on 'The subjective character of experience' emphasises the fact that we can never see through the eyes of the other (1974). Nevertheless, from a qualitative perspective and within the specific epistemological and ontological paradigms adopted in this study, the primary objective is *not* to find universal truths. With regard to children's drawings, it should be noted that

there is no single or 'correct' answer to the question, 'What does this image mean?' (Hill, 1997b)

Furthermore, any individuals' perspectives on a certain issue may be varied and complex. These are in themselves all significant and relevant:

Rather than seeking 'one truthful perspective' from children, we accept that children, as adults, may have many different perspectives on the same issue, and that these are reflective of their context/s. (Dockett & Perry, 2007:49)

With this in mind, we require ‘research strategies capable of enabling and acknowledging those different perspectives and ways of being in the world’ (Mitchell, 2006: 61).

In terms of my research objectives, it is important to clarify that I am not attempting to discover how it *feels* to be a child, or a child playing, but rather, what their experiences of play are in everyday life, and their varied definitions, ideas and concepts of play.

### **3.2.2. Reflexivity**

Our knowledge is often based on a combination of previous experiences and cultural and contextual values which we draw from when constructing participants’ identities (Greene and Hill, 2005). In terms of the child, this will often be some form of prevailing ideology of childhood. This inevitably influences the approaches and methods adopted. As Emond states, ‘the research process...cannot be considered as independent of the researcher’ (2005:126). She expands this idea by describing how we, as researchers, share the social world of our participants. What this means is that both researcher and participant shape the ways in which the other experiences and perceives that world. Social meanings are not universal. In addition, Davis (1998) stresses the importance of reflexivity when engaging in research with children. Accordingly, a reflexive approach encourages researchers to question their assumptions about their ideas and conceptions of both childhood and children as a population. A continually reflexive approach to our own practice can enable us to step outside our adult presuppositions and approach research with children from a more open-minded position.

Reflexive practice could be described as a method of self-analysis: being in a continual state of awareness of how our personal and academic preconceptions impact our own practice and research outcomes (Davis et al., 2008). The key aspects of the process include:

- Continual and intensive scrutiny of interpretations, methods, and practice
- Internal dialogue and questioning
- Challenging your principles and actions
- Challenging preconceptions and assumptions.

What this discussion suggests is that we must maintain a level of awareness throughout the research process both in terms of (i) how our presence affects the situations we go into, possibly impacting participants' responses and behaviour, and (ii) how our assumptions influence our approach to aspects of the research process such as how we interpret responses and analyse data.

It is equally important to reflect on how the theoretical framing of my research influences the role and value of drawing in the research process. My approach, as outlined in section 3.7, is to value and attempt to understand children's drawings as a semiotic vehicle. In other words, drawing is a means of communication where messages are created within the drawing process through representation and signification. Correspondingly, I appreciated the representations as expressing the child's unique interpretation of play rather than seeking realistic or conventional representations of play. In addition, I drew along with the child if requested to do so by the child. This created a shared drawing experience rather than forming distinct prescriptive roles such as the child as performer and the researcher as observer.

Despite the research being conducted in the child's natural setting, the methodological approach is not defined as exclusively naturalistic, but rather a combination of both naturalistic and interventionist. I came to this conclusion because I am aware that although the child may be in a natural context and carrying out everyday activities, my presence, unintentionally, alters the normal dynamics of the child's day. Here, I am not implying that there is a negative or damaging consequence of this change in dynamic, but as researchers we must acknowledge our influence on the child and their everyday contexts rather than claim we have no impact. As Wright (2010) describes, by simply being present, listening and observing, we inevitably become part of that context. Indeed, children may be familiar with unknown adults entering their homes. However, rarely do these social calls result in the adult conversing with children or playing in the child's bedroom. As Ben candidly demonstrated during the pre-pilot, children will be wary of strangers entering their home especially when an interest in the child is demonstrated:

While he shuffled behind his mother, looking at me with suspicion, he asked, 'Do you know her?!'<sup>3</sup>

Conversation between Ben and his mother (Field notes, 19<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2010)

Although I ensured that our interactions were informal, relaxed and allowed a great degree of flexibility in terms of what we did and for how long, I am fully aware that my very presence may impact children's normal repertoire, their behaviour, and verbal responses.

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<sup>3</sup> Any data from my field notes or transcriptions have been distinguished throughout the thesis with the use of a different font (Century Gothic).

### 3.3. Research with children

Methodological issues in research with children suggest two key overarching themes. The first is epistemological concerning adult perceptions of childhood and adult/child differences; the second theme covers issues related to the heterogeneity of childhood in that every individual represents a valid, personal and unique perspective of the world. I will discuss these in terms of both general research with children, and in relation to the specific topic of enquiry in this research: drawing. I examine how these methodological issues affect how we approach the method of drawing as well as the implications for the analysis and interpretation of drawings as representations of children's perspectives.

#### 3.3.1. *Adults and children...same or different?*

Research with children seems to stimulate considerable discussion throughout the literature in regard to whether children, as participants, should be approached from a different angle than that of research involving adults (Punch, 2002). The methods we adopt may be influenced by not only representations of children in society, but also the purpose and objectives of the research, social and cultural context, and the preferences of individual participants (Christensen & James, 2008). Crivello et al. (2009) draw attention to considerations made by researchers which are unique to research with children. For instance, the methods used are often guided by the extent to which they are considered fun. It could be argued that this approach to choosing methods offers little benefit in terms of choosing the most *effective* method. However, if we take account of current approaches to research with young children such as being child-centred and child-led, then a more appropriate approach would be to provide and use tools which already exist within children's daily repertoire. As Christensen (2004)

suggests, to examine children's lives and experiences requires a research approach that allows researchers to enter children's 'cultures of communication':

Understanding the ways that children engage with and respond to research include considering two key questions: are the practices employed in the research process in line with and reflective of children's experiences, interests, values and everyday routines; and what are the ways in which children routinely express and represent these in their everyday life? (Ibid: 166)

Some studies emphasise that using children's preferred methods of communicating is the key approach to addressing issues of power relations in research with children (Barker & Weller, 2003; Stephen *et al.*, 2008). Others suggest that props such as physical, task-based activities and play are almost essential for children to freely express their perspectives (Samuelsson, 2004). Therefore, if children are familiar with research methods, then it is more likely that they will feel confident and able to use them. In addition, children, as participants, can feel empowered, rather than intimidated by unfamiliar or complex tools.

Although many methods have proven effective in research with children, the next stage of challenging methods is the development of techniques and tools which the child finds *engaging*, as well as their suitability for the individual child (Christensen & James, 2008). This will benefit both child and researcher in encouraging rich data through positive and meaningful interaction. Harden *et al.* (2000) warn researchers

While for adults, children's involvement in drawing may be associated with 'fun', we cannot assume that this is the case for all children...not all children are comfortable with it. (Ibid: 2.11)

Indeed, there may be no ‘best’ methods to use with children (Hill, 2006). Instead, the key to accessing children’s perspectives is to ensure that, ‘media for data gathering correspond to activities that children are familiar with in school and in recreational settings’ (Ibid, 2006:79). For this reason, I offered a variety of meaningful and familiar methods of participation in the study such as drawing, conversations and play led by the child.

### ***3.3.2. Children as participants***

Dockett and Perry state that ‘children have long been, “objects of inquiry”’ (2003:205). However, there has been a clear shift in research as a result of the repositioning of children within society (Smith, 2000) and as a result, children’s perspectives have been brought to the foreground. Researchers now emphasise that practice must value children as experts in their own lives, and seek to acknowledge and understand the world as experienced and lived by the child (Clark, 2011). Nevertheless, some studies have challenged the reliability and validity of children’s accounts in terms of abilities to communicate correct information about past events or following questioning. Inevitably, researchers have felt the need to consider additional factors when working with a population still viewed within the boundaries of stages of development and cognitive capacities. For instance, some studies have examined how linguistic complexity, the use of adult concepts and speed of questioning affect children’s responses (Lamb *et al.*, 1999; Scott, 2008; Westcott, 1995). Evidence suggests that children respond better to direct questioning as open-ended questions can confuse the child regarding what they are being asked and what type of response is expected. Other studies raise important concerns regarding the researcher-participant relationship and the power issues that exist between children and adults (Christensen, 2004; Flewitt,

2005). Consequently, the roles of researcher and researched, as well as issues of power between adults and children, bring with them ethical concerns specific to children. Some studies conclude that young children are more suggestible than adults or older children and may feel pressure to conform and respond to adult instruction or direction (Bruck *et al.*, 2000; Flewitt, 2005; Tangen, 2008; Woodhead & Faulkner, 2008). Therefore, the influence of the adults' presence may result in acquiescence and children answering questions which they do not fully understand (Saywitz, 2002). In addition, children may provide particular responses to please the researcher. On account of these various issues, researchers may feel the need to use special methods with young children (Barker & Weller, 2003; Tangen, 2008; Thompson, 2009).

In terms of methodological concerns, the challenge for researchers who seek to access children's perspectives lies in both their approaches to data elicitation and data interpretation. Although these issues should be acknowledged and managed by the researcher through reflexive practice, in terms of my own research objectives (see 1.3 and 3.2) I am not attempting to obtain *correct* responses from children nor am I looking for detailed accounts of real events. Instead, I am looking for the meanings children convey. Therefore, in relation to understanding how it is to be a child, children's accounts are valid in terms of being personal accounts of how *they* experience the world. These experiences cannot be assumed or accessed by the researcher without children's personal insights.

With consideration to the points raised in these sections, I define my research approach as child-centred and child-led. This was achieved by:

- Allowing the child to structure visits

- Only carrying out activities which the child initiates or articulates a desire to participate in
- Exploring participants' subjective perspectives
- Engaging in conversations directly with the child: offering opportunities to express assent, dissent and views
- Listening to the child
- Using a meaningful topic of inquiry (play)
- Seeking consent directly from the child but treating this as conditional based on the child's on-going desire to participate.

### **3.4. Ethical issues**

Access to both children and their perspectives raises various ethical and methodological concerns. Not only must standard ethical requirements be sought with families such as briefing, consent, and data protection, but researchers must also consider the extent of the child's involvement in deciding on their participation. This section discusses some of these ethical issues pertaining to conducting research with children and specific issues regarding the use of drawings as data.

Research approaches, agendas and design remain an area which is still predominantly determined and controlled by the researcher. This will inevitably impact children's level of participation, opportunities to voice their preferences, and the level of power over how they are part of the research process. This is further developed by authors such as Uprichard (2009) who argues that there is a significant discrepancy between theory and practice

Despite what is discussed theoretically in child and childhood research, if we look at the kind of empirical research that children are actually involved in, practice would suggest that children are still considered to be only affective in terms of their own spaces, their own childhoods; even then, most recognise that children's lack of power relative to adults in the social world limits the extent to which children's agency can be exercised. (Ibid, 2009:4)

For this reason, there is a need to question issues of power within the research process and individuals' roles: firstly, between the researcher and participant; and secondly, between the adult and the child.

#### ***3.4.1. Children, gatekeepers and consenting to participation***

The participation of children in research is controlled by a hierarchy of gatekeepers such as parents, ethics committees, teachers, and caregivers (Hill *et al.*, 2004). Consequently, Powell and Smith maintain that, 'it is not easy...for children to exercise their right to participate in research' (2009:125). Understandably, gatekeepers have a responsibility for children, protecting them from potential distress or coercion.

The inclusion of children in research relies heavily on the beliefs and values held by parents. These may include: perspectives on academic research, the positioning of children within society, the topic of research, as well as the methods and ethics involved in the research process.

In terms of gaining consent, the benefit offered by my study is that the method (drawing) and subject to be drawn (play) were seen as non-threatening and unobtrusive. Parents expressed interest in the study by asking questions and showing me their children's previous drawings. They also allowed their children to escort me to their

bedrooms to see toys and play as well as leaving me alone with children after a very short period of time. These observations suggest that families did not consider the process as scrutinising private aspects of their lives, or that children were going to have a negative experience from participating in the research. Nevertheless, some studies have highlighted the ways in which research topics can impact the ease of gaining access to children. For instance, certain subjects discourage gatekeepers to involve their children in research if perceived as controversial or sensitive in nature (Powell & Smith, 2009). However, as demonstrated in the first pre-pilot, the father had great interest in my exploration of children's drawing and illustrated great involvement in his daughter's artistic expressions by showing me examples of her drawings on his personal blog.

It is the responsibility of the researcher to carry out research according to ethical codes of practice. One aspect of this is ensuring consent has been sought from all those involved at each stage of the research process (Morrow & Richards, 1996). Indeed, the issue of consent is a complex issue (Cameron, 2005; Danby & Farrell, 2004). It is a disputed topic where researchers critique the term as being inappropriate for research with children. Instead, researchers suggest children's agreement to participate should be a process of informed assent (Harcourt & Conroy, 2005). In legal terms, it is the parents' consent that is necessary for a child to participate in research (Cameron, 2005). However, studies are now emphasising the importance of gaining consent *directly* from children by actively consulting them and valuing their personal choice (Coyne, 2010; Tangen, 2008). For this reason, consent was sought from both parents and children. Initial consent from the child should be regarded as conditional, and continually revisited and revised in response to children's willingness to participate (Einarsdottir, 2007; Flewitt, 2005). So it seemed more appropriate to consider their willingness to

participate as assent. Assent refers to the child's acquiescence to participate rather than a commitment to take part. This requires the researcher to carefully detect non-verbal signals or behaviour reflecting any discomfort or dissent on account of the child's agreement to participate being considered provisional (Stephen *et al.*, 2008).

The use of children's consent forms actively consults children in terms of their own participation, values their decisions, and empowers them through opportunities to provide their own signatures on adult-type forms. As became apparent from feedback from a number of families, the formalities of ensuring children's rights have filtered down to most contexts and, as a result, parents are accustomed to the necessary protocols such as reading briefings to children and signing consent forms.

#### ***3.4.2. The ethical complexities of using drawings as data***

Anonymity, confidentiality and safe storage are all concerns which seem obvious when dealing with participant information such as interviews transcripts, questionnaires or consent forms. Likewise, we must ensure that drawings are respected in the same manner as any other personal data (Malchiodi, 1998).

The extract below from my pilot study shows the personal nature of drawings and the deep meanings they possess, not only to the child, but *between* the child and someone significant in their lives.

I asked Juliet if I could keep the pictures which she had just drawn. Juliet's expression suggested slight apprehension as she picked up her drawing, looking at it pensively ...then suddenly smiled and said 'Yeah' handing me her drawings while explaining to her mother, 'I'll draw another when she's gone, Okay?'

Conversation with Juliet (Reconstructed from field notes, 26<sup>th</sup> June 2010)

As if not to offend her mother, Juliet reassures her that she will draw more therefore allowing me to have these ones. Even though both parent and child had given consent at the beginning of the research in terms of me retaining the data produced, there is an obligation to respect the child's prerogative at the time of creation. The child will have their own agenda for drawings which may have significant personal meaning and so we may need to confirm that drawings can be kept or photographed throughout the research process.

Many studies highlight the range of ethical issues pertaining to the use of visual images such as photos, video and drawings, with each posing unique challenges and choices to be made regarding anonymity, participant confidentiality, identity, and ownership. An important ethical concern regarding children's drawings is the removal of a child's name and how this relates to the integrity and authenticity of data. Indeed, it is common practice in nursery for children to put their names on drawings. However, this can raise various ethical concerns in the context of research. If children's names are visible in the drawing, the researcher faces an important question: to remove or not to remove? Removing an aspect of a child's drawing could be perceived as affecting the integrity of the data. If one removes the child's name, something of great significance, then where would one stop? An older child may have the skill to produce a self-portrait with uncanny resemblance to themselves. Would this have to be censored to avoid the risk of identification? In addition, considering that many children at four years old may not be able to write their own names, the fact that they *have* written it on a drawing may be empowering for the child. Therefore, the ability to assign ownership to one's own creation may hold significant meaning to a child. Some researchers have dealt with this issue by inserting a blank field over the name (Hopperstad, 2010:434). However, I question whether this is the best approach to managing the issue of anonymity.

Anonymity may be something that should be discussed and negotiated with both parents and children and could be dependent on the nature or topic of research. For instance, children and parents may be more concerned to maintain anonymity when sensitive topics are being explored such as abuse or deprivation. Therefore, guided by my theoretical approach I considered the inclusion of children's names as an important part of that process as well as a symbol of ownership. A name is a representation and symbol in itself, therefore its addition within a picture may have important signification for the child. Accordingly, I decided to contact children and parents to seek their consent for using these drawings in my work, publications, and presentations, without removing the child's name.

### **3.5. Context**

The research was conducted in the child's home to explore this private, less extensively researched context of play. The home environment can provide a fruitful context for involving the child in activities and discussion. As the child is accustomed to the setting and surrounded with personal items there is a sense of identity, familiarity and as a result, a level of control within the context. For example, McKenzie's living room was strewn with her pictures, photos, and toys. In contrast, during the pilot study, Ben's living room seemed void of any evidence of his presence suggesting that another room may have been more familiar or enjoyable as the research setting to play and draw.

There can be great value attributed to these 'childhood domains' in obtaining rich and informative data (Moore, 1986). This could counteract any detrimental issues such as

power imbalances between the researcher and child on account of the researcher being perceived as the naïve guest.

Although the home could be considered a natural setting for drawing, the researcher should not assume that all children are comfortable or familiar with drawing in this context or particular areas within it. The context of research settings can significantly influence the extent and capacity of a child's self-expression and disclosure (Smith *et al.*, 2005). If we are trying to gain the child's perspective then we should invite the child to suggest or choose a setting in which they would feel comfortable to offer their views as valued and respected contributions (Christenson, 2004).

### **3.6. Drawing as a method for accessing children's perspectives**

With the growing complexity of methodological and epistemological concerns arising from the reconceptualization of childhood, there is an increasing requirement for researchers to review their current practice. Methods may be influenced or challenged not only by representations of children in society but also the purpose and objectives of the research, social and cultural context, and the appropriateness of the techniques for the participant as an individual. In other words, researchers should not underestimate the importance of method choice. It necessitates reflection as to *why* they have chosen a particular method, *how* it is applied, and *what* can be expected from its use. The final method chosen must facilitate research by producing relevant data to answer research questions and objectives, as well as being appropriate for participants' individual needs and preferences

...visual methods can: provide an alternative to the hegemony of a word-and-number based academy; slow down observation and encourage deeper and more

effective reflection on all things visual and visualisable; and with it enhance our understanding of sensory embodiment and communication, and hence reflect more fully the diversity of human experiences. (Prosser & Loxley, 2008:4)

As articulated by Prosser and Loxley, there are many benefits offered by using visual methods as a research tool. Many others champion the unique communicative opportunities offered by drawing. Some studies provide evidence that drawings can help children recall events (Gross & Hayne, 1998), children spend longer in an interview situation when drawing (Brown *et al.*, 2008), and it allows children the freedom to be creative (Wright, 2010). Young children use drawings in playful ways to engage in humour, exchange stories, and represent and share meanings. For this reason, it can be a useful tool to facilitate interaction and communication. Furthermore, attention is drawn to the activity being a communicative process which is meaningful and expressive in terms of transferring personal experience to others. Work by Kress (1997) supports this with his reference to drawing as a meaning-making or semiotic activity. He explains how the use of visual resources available to children is employed as a tool in conveying ideas or sharing thoughts and information. Studies have also suggested that reporting the contents of a drawing is seen as less threatening than verbal feedback from direct events or emotion (Miller *et al.*, 1987). Drawing can also facilitate interaction and communication with children and thus is considered a useful ‘springboard’ for discussion (Cox, 2005b).

When we consider drawing as research tool, there are a number of ways in which it can be used (example studies can be found in section 2.6 - 2.7).

- Drawings can be produced and gathered by participants or gatekeepers, over an extended period of time, and possibly from different contexts/settings and

situations. This can be in the form of portfolios, journals, scrapbooks gathered by children, teachers, family members-from school, home, or holidays.

- Drawings can be both prompted and gathered by the researcher using a prompt question or story such as, ‘Please draw a picture of...’
- Drawings can be gathered by the researcher, while still being instigated by the participant in the form of non-commissioned drawings.
- Researchers can use found or produced drawings as springboards for discussion or as data to explore children’s experiences and understanding of particular subjects or concepts.

On account of the various evidence outlined above, drawing is often used as a method for gathering children’s perspectives and gaining an understanding of their experiences (Bessas *et al.*, 2006; Dockett & Perry, 2004; Einarsdottir, 2005; Luquet, 1927; Veale, 2005; Wojaczynska-Stanek *et al.*, 2008). Nonetheless, there are authors who argue that the efficacy of any method will be dependent on other factors such as the individuals with whom they are used, contextual influences, and, most importantly, how successfully they are applied (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008; Hill, 2006).

### **3.7. Drawing as communication and implications for interpreting children’s representations: a social semiotic lens**

This section considers what drawings can offer from a social semiotic perspective. They can be a window into children’s perceptions of the world, elucidating what may be of significance in their everyday lives based on what, and how, they have chosen to depict things within their drawings.

Drawing may serve a pivotal role in children's communication with each other, with adults and conversations with themselves (Thomson, 2008). Through representations we can communicate these experiences to those around us. The theory of communication here is based on the idea that all language is a form of semiosis. The process involves expressing what one wants to communicate by representing this in a culturally accepted way so that it can be interpreted by the receiver (Hodge & Kress, 1988). Therefore, I consider children's drawings as a method of communication where messages are created within the drawing process through representation and signification.

As discussed in 2.8 and 2.8.1, children create and convey meaning in a multiplicity of ways, using a myriad of materials through an array of semiotic 'modes' (Kress, 1997). Some modes will be better than others in conveying particular things, concepts, and to fulfil specific purposes. For example, images allow us to convey a large amount of information at once and in a non-linear fashion. Different modes can be viewed as complimentary ways of conveying additional, as well as *alternative*, information. The use of various modes may be influenced by the individual's preferred forms of communication as well as what is deemed appropriate in certain contexts, social situations, and for different audiences.

For this reason, a multimodal social semiotic approach recognises the interwovenness of various forms of communication and representation. Therefore, if we consider the multimodality of children's drawings, we can begin to understand the benefits, and acknowledge the value of applying a social semiotic framework to children's dynamic modes of visual representation.

A social semiotic theory of *multimodality* is a fork with two prongs, so to speak – the *semiotic* and the *multimodal* prong. The former attends to signs, meaning, to sign- and meaning- *making*... The latter attends to the material resources which are involved in making meaning. (Kress, 2010:105)

The multimodal prong is essential for research methodology and how we approach and record children's multimodal meaning-making practice. In other words, the multimodal aspect of a social semiotic theory enables researchers to gather the richest data by acknowledging all the modes and semiotic resources used in creating meaning through the drawing process. In contrast, the semiotic prong of a social semiotic theory refers to the actual signs and meanings they convey. As signs are always embedded in the social, it allows researchers to take the meanings children convey through the drawing process and interpret them within the wider contexts of social relations and social practices. Therefore, what is perceived by children, as well as what is expressed through their choice of representations, will bear some reflection of the concepts and ideas existing within society and the cultural practices which are unique to the child, their drawings and their play.

Extensive literature supports the role of drawing in eliciting and enriching verbal feedback from children as well as in the process of rapport building (see 2.6 and 3.6). Nevertheless, another important consideration to be made here, and more relevant to current arguments in the field of children's meaning-making and semiosis, is to question what we can gain from using the method as a *communicative* device. In other words, what meanings are being conveyed *during* the drawing process and appearing in drawings? So rather than using drawings as a prop, with the primary benefit being its role as a tool to elicit conversation or interaction with a child, I want to know what children are communicating:

1. *in* their drawings
2. *through* the process of drawing.

As a social practice embedded in children's daily repertoire and cultural contexts, drawings can be analysed within a social semiotic framework where the influence of the world around them can be considered as part of their creative meaning-making process:

Just as grammars of language describe how words combine in clauses, sentences and texts, so our visual 'grammar' will describe the way in which depicted people, places and things combine in visual 'statements'. (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996:1)

If we consider this in terms of meaning-making, then in visual communication, meaning is being conveyed through the individual's choice of colour, size of objects, facture, composition, as well as their decision to include or exclude aspects of representations. Therefore, in the same way that an accent or vocabulary choice can tell us about where someone's from, even offering clues about their profession or age, so too can a drawing. For example, Fynn's drawing of his Indiana Jones<sup>4</sup> computer game (Figure 6.13) suggested cultural practices of playing computer games, indoor play, and the influence of American films.

Our representations and the ways in which we modify them are motivated by different factors such as interest, context, the purpose of drawing, or the meaning children want to convey.

Interest guides the selection of what is seen as the criterial aspects of the object, and this criterial aspect is then regarded as adequately or sufficiently representative of the object in the given context. (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996:6)

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<sup>4</sup> Indiana Jones (explorer and Professor of Archaeology) is a well-known movie character first appearing in the 1981 film 'Raiders of the Lost Ark'. Now, this character features in many other media franchises such as LEGO video games.

It is Kress's description of the 'critical features/aspects' of the image driven by interest and motivation that is the foundation for understanding children's perspectives from their visual representations. Drawing on Kress's work, Mavers (2009:265) argues, 'All images represent a selection' as 'it is neither possible nor necessary to represent everything that is observed, known, remembered or imagined'. Therefore, by taking account of the child's interest as creator, we can attempt to interpret children's drawings as what they view as significant in their representations and experiences of play.

The process of producing signs and symbols evolves through a mutual understanding in culture: establishing accepted conventions, to result in a social process of meaningful forms of communication. Consequently, with age and experience, one learns to identify and typically accept cultural convention for both the production and interpretation of meaning. This is important to note if venturing into research involving the interpretation of *young* children's drawings. Young children may not have yet learned or experienced typically accepted forms of representation. As a result, children's meaning systems can differ significantly from those recognised and used by adults (Miller & Glassner, 1997).

This discussion indicates that alternative interpretations are not uncommon in the reading of children's visual texts. If we are concerned with the meanings conveyed by children's drawings, then we should not be preoccupied by signs which we can interpret with ease according to our own conventional framework for understanding, but to value the images as the child's attempt to convey meaning. We must remember that signs in themselves do not possess meaning, but have been given meaning by those engaging in communication (Jamieson, 2012). Therefore

An important task for those needing to interpret children's drawings is to understand how they signify for the child. (Atkinson, 2002:17)

Accordingly, to understand the child's unique way of viewing the world, one must be cognisant of the child's cultural conventions when it comes to representing their perspectives. Therefore, we must be aware of our interpretations of pictures as their meanings could be markedly dependent on our familiarity with the symbols or representations used by children. When the researcher's objectives are to use this drawing data as representations of the child's perspectives, the last thing that any researcher would want is to misrepresent the child through over- or misinterpretation of their meanings. For instance, if a child draws a bird...is the goal to represent a generic bird, something more specific such as a seagull, or an object that flies like a bird (such as a superhero in flight or a plane)? Therefore, we need to look for both the intentions of the child and the personal signification attributed to the representation by the child themselves (Wright, 2007). Furthermore, Mitchell (2006:70) argues that

Drawing is not an inherently child-centred activity, but one in which relationships of power, authority, and difference need to be acknowledged and integrated into the analysis.

With this in mind, and informed by my methodological principles, I required an analytical approach which asserted the child's rights as expert informer, as well as valuing children's drawing process.

Holliday summarises three approaches for analysing children's drawings (Holliday *et al.*, 2009:249), the major variation, and one which is most significant in terms of valuing and analysing children's drawings, is the shift from *adult* interpretation, to the *child* as interpreter. As Dockett and Perry (2005:515) assert

As with drawings in general, challenges related to this approach include ensuring that interpretation belongs with the child, rather than the researcher; focusing on the message of the drawing, rather than the skill in the drawing.

This is reinforced by Edmiston (2008:186) who suggests that

Adults can also easily assume that they possess superior knowledge and interpretive power to understand what children say, do, think, and feel without really listening and talking with children.

In addition, the theoretical framework adopted in research will inevitably affect how we, as researchers, decide to interpret and analyse children's drawings as it will affect what we choose as the final unit of analysis which in turn will influence which analytical techniques are appropriate or even possible. As previously discussed, my approach is not concerned with reproductions of the world to attain truths relating to play experiences, but is based on an idea of signification as the production of reality as the child perceives it and lives it. I was therefore trying to find a tool to examine the product, an externalised representation of the child's mental picture or concepts, in an attempt to gain a better understanding of the child's perspectives on play. I acknowledged that representations and messages are only made meaningful in their placement within the social context, relationships, cultural practice and personal experience. Contemporary theories of semiotics have evolved to contextualise signs, studying them not in isolation but as a social practice. This was the defining factor for using a social semiotic approach to visual analysis, as the theory is primarily 'concerned with the study of images in their social context' (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001:3). For this reason, social semiotics provided the necessary framework to examine children's

drawings as a communicative device. Nevertheless, Jewitt and Oyama (2001:136) emphasise

Social semiotics is not an end in itself. It is meant as a tool for use in critical research. It only becomes meaningful once we begin to use its resources to ask questions.

Accordingly, the analytical techniques are based on the principles of social semiotics (Hodge & Kress, 1988) as a resource for identifying signs and signification to produce a coherent illustration of children's perspectives on play.

Indeed, drawing could be viewed as a unique form of meaning-making. In contrast to written or spoken language, the meanings conveyed in a drawing are non-sequential (Penn, 2000). In other words, the information is presented simultaneously. For instance, it is not as easy as starting with first line, reading left to right, paragraph by paragraph as would be done in the analysis of a transcript. Does it begin with the content of a drawing? Or how the content has been created i.e. colour, line, materials used, salience, size and so forth? The inherent complexities of analysing a visual image is reinforced by Collier (2001:35) who states that

All elements of an image may be important sources of knowledge through analysis, if only we can identify them and sort them out.

These authors reflected my own issues and challenges when approaching the task of analysing children's drawings and finding a technique which could allow me to 'sort out' the information conveyed, and systematically explore the meanings children have represented.

Therefore, inspired and informed by a social semiotic framework for analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996), a 4-step approach for the social semiotic analysis of drawings was developed to allow a more systematic analysis of the children's drawings. Each drawing was analysed in conjunction with transcripts of conversation and narratives generated by the child's drawing process to ensure that children's meanings were assigned to their representations. As the analytical technique is a substantive part of the thesis, it warrants its own distinct discussion. For this reason, the method of analysis and its development is presented in Chapter 5.

### **3.8. Summary**

What can be concluded from my discussion of methodological approaches and issues is that by considering the heterogeneity of children we can provide methods that are engaging and meaningful for the individual child.

The pre-conception of drawing as 'child-friendly' should not be taken to mean 'child-engaging' or 'child-inclusive'. Methods should be considered as tools that are used to fulfil a function, and this function should be clarified before any decision is made as to which method is to be used. The efficacy of any method will be dependent on a range of factors such as the context, rapport, the participant's familiarity with methods, as well as the methodology adopted. In sum, the methodological principles and characteristics of my research can be defined as: a mix of naturalistic approach and intervention, reflexive, flexible and evolving, child-centred and child-led.

The theoretical approach considers drawing as a communicative tool. It is a multimodal process where children represent and communicate meaning in a multitude of ways during the drawing process. In addition, if we consider communication as situated

meaning-making, we can begin to understand why it is important to explore it within the social and cultural contexts of its creation. It is for this reason that social semiotics is an appropriate framework for the interpretation and analysis of children's drawings as it stems from the notion that language, in whatever form, is embedded in social contexts and social relations.

These methodological principles and the underpinning theoretical framework have informed and guided the development of research design which is detailed in Chapter 4.

## **CHAPTER 4. RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURE**

### **4.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents a detailed account of the empirical data collection. I begin with an overview of the data collection then follow with an in-depth description of each stage of the procedure. This included: pre-pilot and pilot stages, accessing the sample and demographic information, rapport building, drawing activities, ethical considerations, and data analysis. The latter is a brief overview as I have devoted Chapter 5 to analysis on account of the analytical process being one of my main research outcomes. For this reason, Chapter 5 will detail the entire process of analysis as well as the development of a 4-step approach to the semiotic analysis of children's drawings (4-SASA).

The research design and procedure were guided by the methodology defined in Chapter 3. The foundations for methods were inspired by previous studies and literature on using drawing with young children, and the reasoning (or lack thereof) for its routine and popular use. Methods were systematically refined following their actual application in the field from the pre-pilot and pilot stages, through to the final stage of data collection.

## **4.2. Overview of research design**

The process of data collection included a variety of visual and creative methods as well as play and conversations with children. The research involved two visits to the homes of eight preschool children who were asked to represent their perspectives on play through the medium of drawing. The sample included four girls and four boys, aged four to four and a half years, from families across central and north-east Scotland.

The pilot studies provided valuable insight into some of the challenges arising in the research process (see Appendix 1 and 2 for details of the pre-pilot and pilot studies). Any modifications to the research design have resulted from observations of the efficacy or limitations of various methods and approaches in practice.

The primary methodological objective was to create a flexible drawing encounter, offering opportunities for children to express dissent and preferences when it came to participation in activities. This would reflect a qualitative approach to accessing children's perspectives including considerations such as minimising harm and distress, offering choice to participate and share drawings, as well as opportunities to retract from participating or providing responses (Hill, 2005). The flexible nature of both visits encouraged a child-led research process where the researcher is responsive to children's behavioural and verbal cues pertaining to factors such as dissent, preferred contexts of play, and the setting and conditions of drawing activities.

## **4.3. Sample**

The research sample was accessed using a phased sampling strategy which enabled me to gather a pool of families through the process of snowballing. The two families who

participated in the early stages of my research (pre-pilot 2010 in Appendix 1) were accessed through personal contacts, one being a university colleague who had expressed interest in the study, and the other was a family acquaintance. These two families provided me with details of friends and neighbours who had also shown interest in the study. Initial contact was made either in person or via telephone during which I explained my research interest in children's play and drawings. Parents were given a flyer summarising the study and my contact details.

Following this initial contact, families who were interested in participating were sent a more detailed information form outlining what they and their child would be doing. I insisted they were not obliged to take part as all participation was voluntary. Parents provided me with their preferred methods of communication and availability. If a family did not want to participate or the child did not meet the necessary research criteria (such as the child was already attending school), parents would often suggest other friends or colleagues who may be interested in the research and that they would pass on my details.

The initial sample consisted of ten families (one child per family) who had agreed to take part. Visiting all ten families was considered a necessary measure in the event of families deciding to withdraw from the study. Due to factors such as the time scale of the study, the volume of data produced (as evidenced by findings from the pilot study), and the fact that no family withdrew from the study; I restricted the final sample to eight children. The criteria for choosing these eight children were guided by elements of the sample as a whole. I endeavoured to retain a representative group of children in terms of demographic variables such as age, gender and socioeconomic status (SES). For this reason, the youngest child who was not yet four years old, and the oldest child

who was a few weeks from being five years old, were not included in the final analysis.

This resulted in a balanced sample as outlined in Table 4.1.

CHILD	AGE (y:m)	SEX	SES	RATIO M/F
Charlotte	4:2	F	LOW	2:2
McKenzie	4	F	LOW	
Ethan	4	M	LOW	
Tyler	4	M	LOW	
Charlie	4:2	M	HIGH	2:2
Fynn	4	M	HIGH	
Eva	4:5	F	HIGH	
Mia	4	F	HIGH	
MEAN 4.1				N=8

**Table 4.1:** Composition of final sample. All children's names are pseudonyms.

The final sample consisted of eight preschool children (mean age: 4 years, 1 month), from eight separate families, half of whom I assessed as being of low SES. All children attended nursery.

A family background information form (FBIF) was adapted from the family baseline questionnaire used in the project Young Children Learning with Toys and Technology at Home (Plowman *et al.*, 2012). The FBIF was used with parents as a self-report questionnaire to gather details regarding the structure of household, employment status and accommodation. This provided the raw data for the assessment of each family's

SES. The family's SES was assessed using the Office for National Statistics' Standard Occupational Classification coding system (Office for National Statistics, 2010).

The remaining sections of the FBIF were designed to elicit information on family pastimes, children's play preferences, as well as any artistic activities favoured by the child.

#### **4.4. Context**

Both visits were carried out in the child's family home. The drawing activities took place in various contexts within the home according to children's preferences. For instance, a few children drew sitting on the floor or at small tables in the family room, while others preferred sitting at the kitchen table.

Typically, children had habitual areas within the home where they would draw. These were often easily discernible due to the evidence displayed around or on particular tables in the form of ink scribbles and encrustations of glue and glitter. Figure 4.1<sup>5</sup> shows a common drawing context where many children had their own miniature table which they sat at, on the floor or on small chairs. Consequently, adopting the child's natural repertoire and drawing practice was made simple by both observing and allowing children to guide the contexts of our drawing activities.

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<sup>5</sup> All the families consented to the use of photographs and drawings in publications



**Figure 4.1:** McKenzie drawing in the family room - a typical example of children's drawing practice and context.

#### 4.5. Rapport and familiarization

Drawing on literature addressing rapport and familiarity, I intended to make three visits to children's homes. This additional time for building rapport would serve to maximise the child's potential to contribute to research by creating a situation where children feel comfortable expressing themselves and interacting with the researcher (Christensen, 2004; Christensen & James, 2008). The objective of the first visit was solely rapport building, while the second and third would include the drawing activities. However, during the pilot studies I found that children welcomed and invited me into their worlds almost immediately. These observations suggested that two visits were sufficient for data collection and a third visit would be optional in the event of a child taking longer

to become comfortable in my presence. With regard to recruiting families for the final study, fewer visits would hopefully be less taxing on family personal time, therefore encouraging participation.

#### **4.6. Methods**

The use of multiple methods enabled me to obtain different forms of data, capturing different aspects of children's play, the research context, and visual, verbal, and behavioural forms of expression (see Table 4.2 for summary of research methods and raw data collected).

##### ***4.6.1. Use of video***

The main reasons for choosing video were as follows:

- Video reflected the visual nature of the drawing practice.
- It allowed me to interact with children freely rather than focusing on documenting their comments.
- It could capture the fast pace of creating a drawing, children's conversations and behavioural cues.
- Video could facilitate subsequent interpretation of drawings by capturing the multiplicity of modes used in the drawing process and the specific meanings children assigned to representations.

Studies such as Plowman et al. (2008) emphasise the need for a principled use of video. I concluded that video was the tool most appropriate for documenting the multimodal

nature of children's drawing practice. It allowed me to record all modes of communication used by children in the production of drawings. For this reason, I could capture the entire drawing process rather than only having the tangible final product. The children's conversations and drawing practice captured by video were then used during analysis in the form of a transcription. By basing analysis on children's signification rather than on solely adult interpretations I could avoid misinterpreting the meaning conveyed through drawings. Therefore, video was not the primary source of data but was used as a tool to facilitate subsequent analysis.

Because the objective of the drawing activities was to promote children's own, natural drawing practice (such as being a relaxed activity or narrating while they draw), when we engaged in drawing, it was important not to allow aspects of the research process to disrupt this in any way. For that reason, children had been informed about, and shown the video camera, in the first of my two visits. This afforded me insight into children's level of comfort and familiarity with the presence of the video camera. For many, this was a normal part of recording family life.

As the video camera was to be minimally intrusive, I did not want it to be positioned right next to the child, nor did I want a second camera, both of which would have been necessary to capture the child's behaviour *and* the detailed image production on paper. However, capturing the sequence of drawing production was not my objective. Therefore, one camera, placed at a distance from the child, was deemed adequate.

Inevitably, the choice of one camera position excludes other views of the same event. For the purposes of my study, and the fact that aspects of the wider context were recorded using field notes and photography, the function of video footage was to capture the child's drawing process during the prompted drawing activity. To this end,

a close shot was required, and an angle where the child's facial expressions and behaviour could be captured. In addition, the camera had to be close enough to record the child's conversation and sounds effects generated during the drawing process through the attached microphone.

The camera and tripod were set up when the child suggested we do some drawing. As the child made themselves comfortable, setting out materials or pulling cushions from the sofa for me to sit on, I would place the tripod (with camera already attached) at a diagonal angle from the child so as not to place it directly in their line of sight. I ensured that the child and table top with materials were in the viewing frame. As we began drawing, I would use the camera's remote control, which I had on the floor by my side, to initiate the video recording. The recording was stopped once the child had exhausted drawing and decided they wanted to do something else. At times, the recordings would be paused, again using the remote, if the child and I left the room to retrieve something from their bedroom that related to our conversations or drawings. On our return, I would resume the recording using the remote.

A total of 212 minutes of digital video footage was recorded. The length of time varied for each child depending on how long they spent on each prompted drawing, and whether they produced spontaneous drawings between prompted drawings. The duration of recording for each child was approximately 30 minutes.

<b>METHOD</b>	<b>METHODOLOGICAL OBJECTIVES &amp; RATIONALE</b>	<b>DATA COLLECTED</b>
<b>Drawing</b>	Focus of inquiry - exploring method in practice. Non-threatening and familiar method to use with young children.	98 drawings collected. Tables 6.1 and 6.2 provide a breakdown of drawing data. Thumbnails of drawings can be found in Appendix 3 & 4.
<b>Participatory observation</b>	Child-led approach, therefore participating in activities with children upon invitation. Structure of visits and inclusion of researcher determined by child. As a result, researcher at times observing, and others, involved in children's play.	Field notes from 16 visits (two visits per child); written up after each visit as chronological accounts.
<b>Video recording</b>	Episodes of prompted drawing activities recorded for detailed documentation of the drawing process. These recordings facilitated the ensuing analysis of children's drawings.	212 min of video recordings documenting drawing activities. Charlotte: 36 min Ethan: 18.20 min Fynn: 20 min McKenzie: 30 min Mia: 18.40 min Tyler: 19 min Charlie: 35 min Eva: 35 min
<b>Photography</b>	Photos taken by both child and researcher-contextualising drawing activities and research study. Empowering child by involving them in research process: data collection and production.	202 photos of context, children, drawings (past and present), toys and play things.
<b>Conversation with children</b>	Building rapport and allowing opportunities for expression of dissent. Child-centred research practice: child is primary focus of interest. Allowing child to vocalise preferences via direct consultation.	Field notes from 16 visits (two visits per child). Personal information, direct quotes, individual needs and preferences of participant.
<b>Conversations with parents</b>	Building rapport with gatekeepers and developing the trust of family as a whole.	Personal information, family dynamics, child's preferences. Gathered over 16 family visits.
<b>Family Background Information Form (FBIF)</b>	Ensuring representative sample. Identifying family structure and SES.	FBIF x 8. Family demographics, activities and preferences.

**Table 4.2:** Summary of research methods and rationale for use.

#### **4.6.2. Photos**

Additional data was obtained as a consequence of children and/or parents choosing to show me drawings displayed on kitchen walls or kept from past activities. These drawings were photographed and categorised as ‘past free drawings’ (PFD) as they were collected by proxy and not in the presence of the researcher. Photography was also used as a means of recording the context of the research and drawing activities. Both children and I took photos of various areas of the house, toys, equipment, and each other. These photos as well as my observations were used in the semiotic analysis as references to inform my interpretations of children’s drawings (see Chapter 5).

#### **4.6.3. Drawing materials**

Malchiodi (1998) offers some insights into the importance of providing a variety of media as children’s expressiveness benefits from the accessibility of a wide range of materials. It would be unreasonable to assume the method of drawing can successfully facilitate the child’s expression if the tools on offer were limited and substandard. Furthermore, preferences for certain materials differ from child to child depending on drawing style and subject. For instance, some children may tend to include more intricate detail in their drawings thus requiring pencils or thin crayons. Consequently, these children would find ‘chunky’ crayons which are often presumed appropriate for younger children, frustrating and inadequate for their specific drawing styles. On the other hand, I found that with some children, the thinner crayons and the tips of coloured pencils were more likely to break because of the manner in which children held them or the pressure placed on the tools. This was equally frustrating for children. For this reason, I chose to provide a range of drawing materials, differing in actual medium as

well as size. The materials provided were as follows: A4 blank white paper, coloured pencils, coloured felt-tip pens, both ‘chunky’ and thin crayons. The children were welcome to use their own drawing materials if they so wished. This was in fact the case with a few of the children who had designated trays or pencil cases full of drawing supplies as illustrated in Figure 4.2.



**Figure 4.2:** An example of children’s own drawing materials – McKenzie described these as her ‘special’ crayons.

#### **4.7. Overview of procedure**

Two visits were scheduled with each family. Each visit was approximately 90 minutes in duration. Visits were carried out in a flexible and unstructured manner with the purpose being to allow the child autonomy and freedom regarding our level of interaction and the types of activities with which they wished to engage.

The first visit included completing research protocols such as briefing, family background information form, and obtaining signed consent forms. This visit also

served as a period of mutual acclimatisation between the family, child and researcher. Rapport was established through free play, drawing, and conversations with children (example activities in Figure 4.3). Exclusive interaction with the child generally began by asking if they would like to play something. In most cases, children promptly demonstrated their inquisitive and amiable nature by approaching me to ask questions, look at the materials I had brought, show me something, and invite me to play with them. Children were also keen to show me their bedrooms, play rooms, or favourite toys.

On the majority of my visits parents would happily leave me and their child to play and draw. On other occasions parents sat in, for instance, the living room with us, watching and chatting as their child and I played and drew.



**Figure 4.3:** Examples of activities and play in which children wanted to engage during my visits such as (from top left) outdoor activities, playing dinosaurs, racing cars, imaginary play and construction, ‘mums and dads’, and ‘farms’.

#### ***4.7.1. Drawing activity***

At the beginning of both visits I informed the child that I had brought drawing materials if at any point during our time together they would like to use them. If the child responded immediately with a desire to draw then we would create a space for our activities. My involvement in the activity was dictated solely by the child. On some occasions, the child chose to draw by themselves, while I was requested to sit and watch. However, the majority of children wanted me to draw with them. This created a social situation where focus was taken off the child as ‘the observed’ or performer as we engaged in the activity together.

The second visit mirrored the first in that the children and I engaged in play such as role playing mothers and babies with Eva or building rail tracks and castles with McKenzie. I also engaged in conversations with children and drawing if children desired. The main alteration to the visits was that during any free drawing, I would invite the child to draw their perspectives on play. This took the form of two prompt questions: (1) Will you draw anything you can think of when you hear the word ‘play’? This prompt question was based on a question used in a study exploring children’s perceptions of recess by Angelides and Michaelidou (2009), and (2) Will you draw a person playing? The second prompt was chosen to offer a more concrete question as opposed to the abstract nature of the first.

The topic of ‘Play’ was chosen for children’s prompted drawings to (i) offer children a meaningful research activity to investigate the issues surrounding the method, (ii) to explore the task of representing an abstract, yet familiar, concept and how this may influence children’s drawings and representations of play, and (iii) as an extension of the ESRC project Young Children Learning with Toys and Technology at Home

(Plowman *et al.*, 2012) by giving greater emphasis to children's own perspectives on play and exploring the ways in which this can be achieved.

For the purposes of this study, children's spontaneous drawings were defined as non-commissioned, 'free drawings' (FD) as they were not created in response to a prompt question. In comparison, the drawings which were produced during the prompted drawing activity in the second visit were defined as 'prompted drawings' (PD) as they were generated in response to the two prompt questions. These were designed as means of inviting children to represent their perspectives on play through their drawings. This distinction is important because observations and literature suggest drawings have different functions as well as continuing issues of adult/child roles thus children may alter what and how they draw when prompted by an adult. Using a prompt question in the study allowed me to explore what types of drawings would be generated and how these facilitate an exploration of children's perspectives on play. Thumbnails of the children's prompted drawings and free drawings can be found in Appendix 3 and 4.

These prompted drawing activities were video recorded to inform the analysis of children's drawings.

#### **4.8. Ethical considerations**

Prior to the commencement of the main data collection, ethical approval was sought from the School of Education Research Ethics Committee, University of Stirling. Once permissions were granted by the departmental ethics committee, families were contacted in regard to participation. The research was also undertaken in accordance with the British Educational Research Association's Revised Ethical Guidelines for

Educational Research (2004) and the Association's second revision of the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2011).

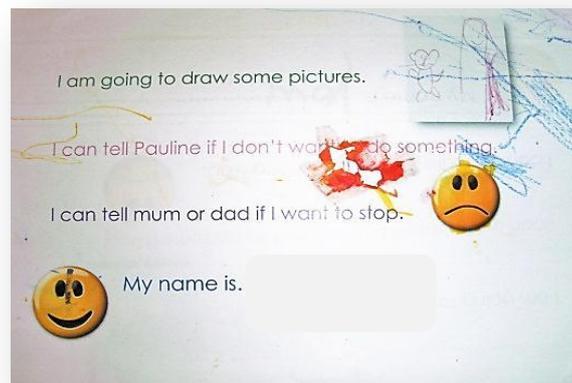
#### ***4.8.1. Information forms and consent***

Consent was sought from both parents and children. I sought verbal consent from children's parents prior to scheduling visits to the family home. Initial consent from the child was regarded as conditional based on their on-going willingness to participate (Einarsdottir, 2007; Flewitt, 2005). Accordingly, the study used three forms of consent with the child: verbal; behavioural such as signs of distress or dissent (Stephen *et al.*, 2008); and written. An example consent form is shown in Figure 4.4. The use of a highly visual consent form for the children was appreciated by the parents as they commented on its aesthetic appeal and the fact that children were included in the consent process. Nevertheless, the form may have only been a momentary and decontextualised task for the child. Therefore, I felt it was more appropriate to use children's consent forms as a conditional agreement and respect the child's rights in regard to voluntary participation by basing assent or dissent on behaviour and responses throughout the visits and various tasks. Furthermore, my child-led approach encouraged children to guide the situation, our interaction, and the structure of drawing activities. This on-going process of consent was managed by ensuring that during all stages of the research process, children were provided with frequent opportunities to decline from participating in something, from interaction or responding to me. These were often presented in the form of questions such as, 'Do you want to keep drawing or do something else?' or, 'We can stop if you like/if you're bored?'

Pauline: Do you want me to do some drawing or will I just sit  
and watch you?  
Fynn: Sit and watch.

Conversation with Fynn (Transcription, 30<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2010)

The excerpt above shows the importance of allowing children to make choices regarding the structure of the research process. By allowing such opportunities children can choose to participate within the conditions with which they feel comfortable. If I had simply commenced drawing along with him, Fynn may have not participated in the activity for the same length of time, or with the same level of comfort and conversation.



**Figure 4.4:** Children's consent form.

#### ***4.8.2. Participant privacy and confidentiality***

Both electronic and hard copies of children's drawings and personal information pertaining to the families were stored in secure files. These measures ensured data relating to the participants was kept confidential. Pseudonyms were used from the onset of the research process to maintain anonymity. Pseudonyms were used in documents such as: field notes, diary inputs, transcriptions, data storage and drawings (electronic and hard copies), analysis and reporting the final research findings in the thesis. There were, however, two children who included their names within their drawings. Initially I had thought to remove or cover these children's names using photo software so that I could still use the drawings without breaching their rights of confidentiality and anonymity. After considering the meaning children are conveying with the inclusion of their names, I concluded that this 'stamp' of identity could not be removed without offering this decision to the child. Writing their names on drawings was not only a part of their meaning-making, but was a symbol of ownership. A name is a representation and symbol in itself and the inclusion or exclusion of it within a child's picture may have important signification for the child. For this reason, I decided to contact children and parents to seek their consent for using these drawings in my work, publications, presentations, without removing the child's name from their pictures. Both parents responded positively and had ensured that the child had been informed and further consent had been granted. Fortunately, carrying out the research within the context of the child's home meant that there was more flexibility than educational contexts in terms of any new ethical concerns arising through the research process. Communicating directly with families, rather than through a series of gatekeepers such as teachers and managers, meant I could return to them and inquire about obtaining revised consent regarding the specific data I had gathered.

Briefing and debriefing was conducted with each family explaining the purpose of the research, format of visits, and the option to withdraw. This offered families an opportunity to voice any concerns or questions relating to structure of visits, what the parent's role was, outcomes envisioned for the study, background information about me and if and how findings will be disseminated.

#### ***4.8.3. Managing and analysing the data***

As previously discussed, data collection involved a number of different methods. This resulted in a diverse data set to manage and analyse. In order to record events, I had brought a digital still camera, a digital video camera, and a fieldwork diary to all the visits. The diary provided a means of recording factual and reflective field notes. I noted the time of day and date of my observations, any features of the context, the physical setting within the home where the child and I played or engaged in drawing, the presence of parents or siblings, direct quotes from children, and brief descriptions of the drawings. I also included small sketches of the children's drawings next to the quotes or descriptions I had noted, ensuring I had logged the meanings of drawings which were not produced, nor video recorded during the prompted drawing activity.

My field notes also included my own reflections, questions and interpretations that came to mind during my visits.

Immediately after each visit, I would write a detailed narrative of the visit from beginning to end so that important details of my visit were not forgotten, as well as providing a richly descriptive chronological account of events. The accuracy of the account was strengthened by my field notes, which were used as a source for direct quotes and outlined the sequence of events.

All drawings were kept by the researcher and/or photographed for reference. If there was any hesitation from the child regarding me keeping their drawings, I would simply ask to take a photograph of the child's picture so that I had a copy in the absence of the original. Digital images (as .JPEG photographs) of the drawings were taken and uploaded to my PC (Appendix 3 and 4). Digital copies of the drawings provided both a back-up of all drawing data and a practical way of organising, analysing and presenting the data throughout the research process.

All video recordings were transcribed. The transcriptions were used to facilitate the process of interpreting drawings during the 4-step approach to the semiotic analysis of children's drawings (4-SASA). The approach to transcribing the video was guided by the purpose of the transcription (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). My primary objective was to access children's perspectives on play; therefore my focus was not on recording extensive detail relating to linguistic style or pauses in conversation, but rather the meanings children conveyed during the drawing process. These meanings were expressed in various ways such as role-play and action, sound effects and speech. I also chose to concentrate on transcribing data which contributed to understanding children's perspectives on play. Therefore, sections of video such as children's drawing commentary are transcribed verbatim while others are summarised where behaviour or conversation did not add anything to my understanding of the drawing or views on play. The transcription was only the preliminary stage of documenting and analysing the complex drawing process on account of the ensuing detailed analysis which was carried out using my 4-SASA which is described in Chapter 5.

The video transcriptions and field notes were used in parallel with the drawing data during analytical stages and in the development of findings. Working across different

modes of data afforded me valuable and diverse information which could be used to describe children's rich and complex drawing process.

The process of analysis, as well as reporting play and drawing episodes as text, required a comprehensive examination of the data set in order to explore ways of integrating the information provided by the individual methods. The data included field notes (providing accounts of all interactions and events not captured in the video footage), transcriptions (providing detailed accounts of children's drawing process such as gestures and explicit descriptions of their drawings), photographs, and children's final drawings.

More extensive discussion of the findings were facilitated by sporadically revisiting field notes, transcriptions, photos and annotated drawings in order to embed drawings or conversations in a wider context. My understanding and interpretations of events relied greatly on the information that framed the drawing activities, yet existed outwith the frame of the camera lens.

All data was analysed to identify signs and signification to produce a coherent illustration of children's perspectives on play. The analytical techniques employed are based on the principles of semiotics which allows analysis of a range of data using a single comparative coding system (Hodge & Kress, 1988).

The 4-SASA was developed to allow a more systematic analysis of children's drawings as well as privileging the child's signification and attribution of meaning rather than adult interpretations. Accordingly, each drawing was analysed in conjunction with transcripts of conversation and narratives engendering from the drawing activities. All prompted drawings as well as selected free drawings were analysed using the 4-SASA.

Families and children were thanked for their participation. Children were sent certificates of participation addressed to them. I followed up visits with a text or letter thanking parents for their involvement and reminding them not to hesitate if they had further questions, or were interested in dissemination and publications. Children were given drawing materials as a token of appreciation.

#### **4.9. Summary**

This chapter discussed my methods of data collection. This included: pre-pilot and pilot stages, accessing the sample, drawing activities, ethical considerations, and data analysis. The process of data collection included a variety of visual methods as well as play and conversations with children. The research involved two visits to the homes of eight preschool children who were asked to represent their perspectives on play through drawing. The sample included four girls and four boys, aged four to four and a half years, from families across central and north-east Scotland.

Children's drawings and details about the data collected can be found in the following sections of the thesis:

- Table 4.2 for an overview of methods and data collected
- Table 6.1 and 6.2 for a detailed breakdown of the drawing data
- Appendix 3 and 4 for thumbnails of children's free and prompted drawings.

## **CHAPTER 5. A 4-STEP APPROACH TO THE SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF CHILDREN'S DRAWINGS**

### **5.1. Introduction**

The following chapter describes my method of analysis including how I developed a 4-step approach for the semiotic analysis of children's drawings (4-SASA).

A review of literature revealed that researchers routinely use drawings as a way of obtaining data from children but few adopt methodological and analytical techniques that take account of the multimodality of young children's drawings. The few that have do not make the process explicit. This proved problematic when trying to replicate analytical procedures on my own data. With these concerns in mind, I knew that an aspect of my research process would be to find an analytical technique which would ensure a principled method for analysing children's drawings, as well as privileging the child's signification and attribution of meaning rather than adult interpretations. Informed by social semiotics (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996), this chapter describes the 4-SASA, involving: (i) identifying signs within drawings through manual annotation, (ii) isolating individual signs and documenting the child's understanding of signs and social significance, (iii) organising signs using specific categories of social semiotic analysis in order to identify the child's motivation and interest for specific sign production, and (iv) synthesis of the child's perspectives from steps 1-3, focusing on information relating to play and choices underlying the criterial aspects of representations (what to include or exclude to illustrate play); thus constructing a

summary of the child's perspectives and conceptualisations of play. Each drawing was analysed in conjunction with transcripts of conversation and narratives generated by the child's drawing process. Together, the four steps provide a systematic and detailed description of children's representations enabling the researcher to interpret children's concepts, experiences, and understandings of play as revealed by their drawings.

In this chapter, I describe the method of analysis specifically within the context of exploring children's perspectives on play as this is the focus of my study. However, the same four-step approach can be used to investigate any topic. In these circumstances, one would follow steps one to three as described in section 5.4, and then step four would focus on the researcher's main focus of inquiry. This would result in a comprehensive account of the topic of interest. Alternatively, if the researcher did not have a focus of inquiry, for instance studies investigating what children communicate through drawing, then the first three steps would be followed as outlined in this chapter. Then, rather than focusing on a specific or predetermined topic of interest in step four, the researcher would extract the main themes arising in steps one to three as revealed by children's drawings. Furthermore, the four-step approach can be used with any type of drawing as well as with those produced by adults and older children.

The chapter begins with a brief summary of the theoretical framework which underpins my analytical approach. I then discuss how the 4-SASA emerged as the outcome of my research. I will outline the analytical technique through examples of the process as applied to my visual data. For the purposes of exemplifying the application of analytical techniques, two drawings were chosen from which it was possible to provide the two most *varied* representations of children's drawings: from concrete and realistic images to the abstract and more difficult to discern. The criterion for choice of example



**Figure 5.1:** McKenzie's prompted drawing representing a football match.



**Figure 5.2:** Charlotte's prompted drawing representing playing with playdough.

one, McKenzie's prompted drawing (Figure 5.1), was that it allowed me to draw upon the broad spectrum of social semiotic categories of analysis, thus revealing the potential of the technique in providing a comprehensive and highly detailed analysis. In contrast, the criterion for choosing Charlotte's prompted drawing (Figure 5.2) was to offer a comparative piece of visual data which differed in complexity, with less discernible content or realistic representations. This is followed by a detailed description of each step of the analytical technique. I conclude by summarising the outcomes of my analysis in terms of children's perspectives on play for the two children I have used as examples in this chapter.

## **5.2. Why a social semiotic analytical technique?**

I want to briefly reiterate my theoretical approach as it is necessary to contextualise my analytical framework and its application to children's drawings. My approach considers children's drawings as a method of communication, where messages are

created within the drawing process through signification. This theory of communication is based on the idea that all language is a form of semiosis. Social semiotics stems from the premise that signs and messages are always situated within various contexts of social processes and social relations where meaning is represented (the signified), and then expressed or conveyed through an apt form (the signifier). Representations are ultimately context-bound. Hence the adopted framework facilitates an exploration of individuals' visual expressions as representations of their perspectives, and the wider culture and subcultures to which they belong.

THREE PRINCIPLES OF SOCIAL SEMIOTICS	APPLICATION TO ANALYTICAL APPROACH	APPLICATION TO CHILDREN'S DRAWING PROCESS
<b>SIGN is central</b>	Sign is fundamental unit of semiosis	Various (elements of) representations in drawings and drawing process
<b>SIGN is result of intent</b>	Motivated signs	Aspects of representations motivated by: interest, context, purpose of drawing and meaning to be conveyed
<b>SIGN is chosen as most apt form of representation for communication</b>	Culturally formed modes and means of communication  Each having different modal affordance- influencing what we use (as determined by context and social situation)	What child perceives as most apt representation of subject or concept  Child may question if the interpreter will identify messages correctly  Using a culturally conventional representation such as drawing a circle to represent a ball and using speech to describe its motion

**Table 5.1:** The three core principles of social semiotics and their application to drawings. Column one outlines the three core principles of social semiotics (Kress, 2001:72). Columns two and three detail my evaluation of how these principles relate to, and facilitate, analysis and how they can be applied to children's drawing process.

The three principles which underlie social semiotics (Kress, 2001:72) are described in column one of Table 5.1. I have illustrated how these principles relate to the analytical approach (column two). The final column clarifies how the three principles could apply to children's drawing practice as well as suggesting the implications for subsequent analysis and interpretation of images (my developments are shown in columns two and three).

Jewitt states, 'Social semiotic multimodality places the work of the sign-maker at its centre' (2009:31). Therefore a *multimodal* social semiotic approach takes account of the various affordances different modes have and how children may favour particular modes over others within different contexts or depending on the meaning they are trying to convey.

The way in which this manifests in children's drawing practice is that certain modes will have more prominence than others in certain situations and at certain times. The choice of mode will be dependent on their particular affordances allowing the child to express different meaning (Mavers, 2009).

McKenzie: ...but the football match were not kidding coz they had *fire* powers!

Pauline: Wow!

McKenzie: Like me. That's me. That's my friend and she's got fire power as well. But they don't know that we have fire power so we get the fire power and wiggled our feet... [She flings her feet in the air, wiggling them vigorously] and then... weeeee... weeeee... [Now making stabbing motions with her feet pointed towards me] Fire them with our feet!

Conversation and drawing with McKenzie (Transcription, 25<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2010)

If we look at McKenzie's drawing shown in Figure 5.3, the girls have, 'fire power', a concept she described as enabling the figures to have special abilities. However, as the transcript above shows, this concept of fire power was conveyed using gesture, bodily movement, body positioning such as the child turning towards me, as well as sound effects. In this case, it is not that the image did not represent the concept of fire power, or as Mavers argues, it is not that the image or other modes were more truthful, but rather that the image itself was not sufficient in conveying the concept to another individual. Here, using Kress's terms, the modal affordance of the image itself was considered inadequate to accurately represent this idea. By acknowledging and valuing this multimodal process of drawing, researchers can gather rich data, rather than decontextualized, static images of play.

### **5.3. The complexities of analysing visual data and the need for a suitable principled approach**

Unlike other forms of data, there are few well-defined or widely accepted rules for the analysis of visual images, in particular, children's drawings. Although the use of social semiotics as a tool for visual analysis has been written about extensively (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001; Kress, 1997; Kress, 2010; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Mavers, 2011) providing a definitive account of how social semiotics should be used as a method of analysing young children's drawings remains a difficult task. The challenges exist due to three key issues outlined below. These points summarise discussion presented in the literature review.

I. *Lack of examples.*

Although there are examples of social semiotics being used as a technique for analysing children's spontaneous drawings, these are often with older children who produce more complex and realistic drawings, or analysis is based on figure drawings (Bessas *et al.*, 2006; Hopperstad, 2008a; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). When working with four-year-old children, researchers cannot foresee or guarantee the production of human figure drawings in the data set, nor can they rely on the production of realistic representations. For this reason, social semiotic analysis is not easily replicated when data does not mirror existing examples in the literature.

Social semiotic analysis is often used on visual data such as posters, oil paintings and advertisements. These are essentially designed images, and more specifically, images designed by *adults*. In addition, these images are most often created for very specific social purposes, with explicit and premeditated messages. These types of data could be considered very different from young children's spontaneous drawings. Although children's drawings could be considered designed images, the amount of time and thought going into production of a drawing varies greatly and is certainly not commensurate with the months of brainstorming and draft designs before a poster, piece of artwork or advertisement is completed.

The majority of examples using social semiotics are on found images. These are analysed by pulling from elements of the social context of their creation and the possible motivations and interest of the creator. In other words, the researcher was not present at the time of its creation, thus analysis is based solely on the researcher's interpretation and speculation, not the creator's interpretation of the signs and meanings attributed to them.

II. *The diversity of visual images requires a flexible analytical technique.*

Reflecting on pre-pilot data, children's representations varied greatly in level of abstraction and degree of detail even by children of the same age and same gender. Therefore, the categories of analysis outlined by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) were not always easy to apply to young children's drawings.

III. *Researchers do not make the analytical process explicit.*

Studies using social semiotics for analysing drawings often present descriptive interpretations of children's pictures with little information regarding the process of analysis (Hopperstad, 2008a; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). For this reason, analytical techniques are difficult to replicate.

Overall, young children's drawings are unique forms of visual representation. Drawings may be very limited in terms of details and representational images. What may be present in one drawing will not necessarily be present in another. These may include human figures, various aspects of the human form, contextual information, text, colour and so forth. For this reason, analytical criteria such as anchoring of images with written text or the direction of gaze in characters are difficult or impossible to use when presented with drawings of scribbles, circles, and human beings without facial expressions or limbs such as Charlotte's drawing of playing with playdough in Figure 5.2. This led me to question how I could systematically analyse such varied data.

Kress and van Leeuwen's approach to visual analysis (1996) provides a comprehensive descriptive framework for interpreting images but the lack of worked examples posed a challenge when using the theory as a formal analytical technique. I sought a principled

and more straightforward method which documented each stage of analysis. When presented with a child's drawing, what do I do next?

To summarise my requirements, the analytical technique had to:

- Be applicable to *young* children's drawings. The technique should not rely on extensive content or features possibly absent in young children's drawings such as signs to anchor the image, human figures, colour, or gaze.
- Demonstrate flexibility. The technique must acknowledge and embrace the diversity of data produced.
- Take account of the entire drawing process and not just the tangible product.
- Be well-defined and explicit. A transparent technique will allow replicability by other researchers new to the theory or visual analysis.
- Be guided by the third research objective, 'to gather *children's perspectives* on play through the method of drawing'. For this reason, I require an approach that uses and privileges the meanings attributed to representations by the children themselves rather than basing analysis solely on adult interpretations. The *child's* signification will take precedence, and only in the absence of this will my own interpretations be applied.
- Have a standardised process. This will ensure a systematic and consistent method of analysis with each drawing. In other words, using the same process with each drawing, with the same rigour; examining the same social semiotic categories.

With consideration to the outlined requirements and my attempts to construct a relatively linear and structured process to achieve these, the resulting procedure was a

four-step process of analysis which could be followed with each drawing. This would ensure thorough and rigorous analysis, as well as producing structured records of the process using the appropriate documents at each stage.

To summarise, I am using Kress and van Leeuwen's theoretical framework and categories of analysis primarily in steps two and three. However, I have organised these categories within a unique four-step process constructing a systematic analytical process with which to approach children's drawings using my prepared templates and documents and detailed instructions. This will allow a level of transparency and ensure a rigorous approach for analysing children's drawings. By developing distinct steps and practical solutions for applying the theory to young children's drawings, I hope to provide an accessible and replicable analytical technique for future research.

I condensed the classification to allow ease of use and suitability for young children's drawings rather than a designed or adult image. I also created standardised documents which could be used at each stage for every drawing. This meant that recording the analysis was clear and straightforward, and each document revealed the outcomes of the four distinct stages of analysis. It is important to note that my objective is not to offer detailed descriptions of the creation of the drawing such as every changing glance or every hand movement. Instead, I focus on the child's meaning-making in terms of communicating their perspectives on play.

In addition, I also draw on research approaches which promote children's own signification whereby the image is predominantly analysed using the creator's narrative rather than adult speculation and valued as process rather than final product.

#### **5.4. Developing a 4-step approach to the semiotic analysis of children's drawings (4-SASA)**

In this section, I describe my four-step process of analysis based on select categories defined in Kress and van Leeuwen's social semiotic framework of visual grammar (1996) such as mode, interest, motivation, 'criterial aspects' of an image, and salience. Drawings were analysed in conjunction with transcripts of children's video recorded descriptions, conversations, and other modes of communication generated by the drawing process such as gesture, sound in the form of song or sound effects. All of the children's prompted drawings, as well as selected free drawings, were analysed using the four-step approach described below. The reason for doing the detailed analysis on *select* free drawings was determined by my interest in the study on *what* was being communicated in terms of children's perspectives on *play*. Accordingly, only the drawings which related to play were analysed using the 4-SASA. These were: (i) the prompted drawings where children were asked to draw, for instance, a person playing, and (ii) spontaneous drawings where children referred to, or described aspects of their representations as relating to play. If a researcher was using drawings to explore what children represent and convey through drawing or how children create meaning then all the children's drawings would be analysed using the 4-SASA. If, on the other hand, researchers were exploring something specific, then the researcher would select drawings which related to this specific topic.

Analysis was carried out once all data collection was completed.

### **Step 1: Annotating children's drawings**

The first step involved identifying and labelling signs within the child's drawings by manual annotation of the image. The annotation process for McKenzie's drawing is shown in Figures 5.3 and 5.5, and the annotation for Charlotte's drawing is shown in Figures 5.4 and 5.6. The annotation was achieved by placing a printed copy of the drawing into a plastic sleeve allowing detailed notation correlating to the actual drawing. The meanings conveyed by children were inferred from the recorded conversations and narratives prompted by the drawing process, such as the transcription excerpt shown in Figures 5.3 and 5.4. By using the additional data collected through video and field notes, I could ensure that the correct meanings were annotated on the drawings as defined by the children themselves.

To exemplify the methodological process of annotating the children's drawings, I have called attention to one of McKenzie's comments in the transcript (circled in red) then indicated where this would then be noted, by hand, on a printed copy of the drawing, next to the relevant aspect of the representation to which McKenzie is referring (Figure 5.3). This process would be carried out using the entire transcript of McKenzie's descriptions and signification, slowly building the meanings assigned to each aspect of her drawing. The final annotation is shown in Figure 5.7.

The same process of annotation is shown for Charlotte's drawing in Figure 5.4. Again, the child's meaning is identified in the transcript (circled in red) and then noted next to the relevant aspect of the representation to which the child is referring. In Charlotte's case, she refers to 'me' thus giving meaning to the small face in the corner of the page. The full annotation of the drawing is shown in Figure 5.8.

It is important to note that, as stated previously, McKenzie's transcript extract is a small section of over two pages of transcription. For this reason, an extensive amount of McKenzie's meanings can be annotated onto the original drawing. By contrast, the total commentary generated during Charlotte's drawing which only took seconds to produce is limited to the one line which is presented in Figure 5.4.

McKenzie: Look, this is someone playing! ...Look... and that's the football.... And there's a person on the football. And if someone catches it, he says, 'Who got the ball!?!'

*[Looks at me with perplexed expression]*

Pauline: Oh my goodness!

McKenzie: And then they throw it back!

*[Stands up and role plays throwing of ball]*

...and if they have the ball they say, "who got the ball?" and then "We did!" they say.

*[Sits back down]*

...that's what they're playing: With you. You is here. *[looks at me while pointing her pen at a figure in the corner of her play scene]*

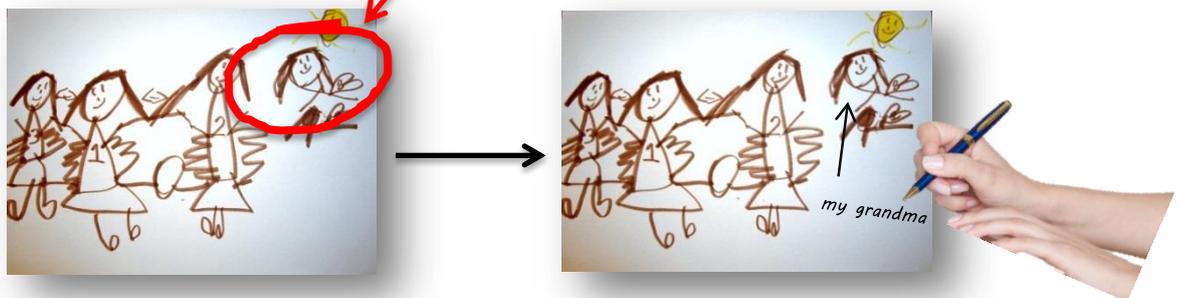
Pauline: Yeah?

McKenzie: And **you're playing with your grandma** *[begins drawing the small fairy grandma].*

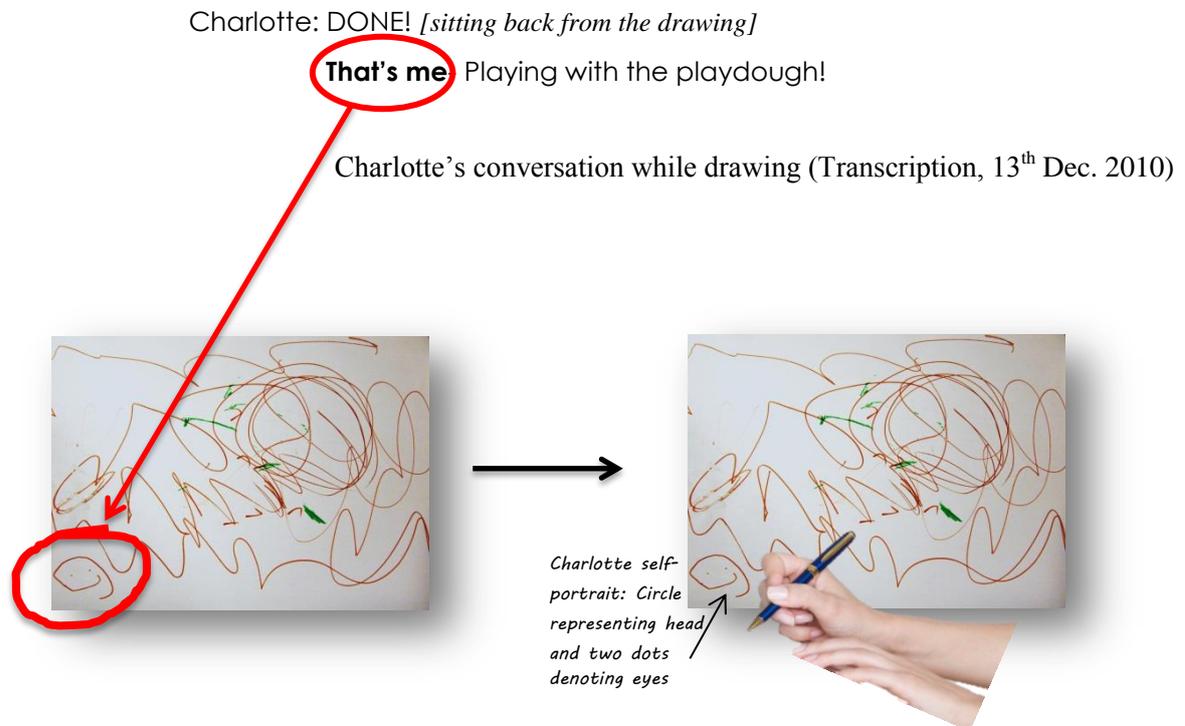
Pauline: Aaaw, that's nice.

McKenzie: She's got curly hair

Drawing and conversation with McKenzie (Transcription, 25<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2010)



**Figure 5.3:** Version one of McKenzie's drawing (left) - the original image which was used along with the transcription generated by the drawing process. Version two of McKenzie's drawing (right) - an example of how I applied the explicit meaning assigned by children to particular aspects of the representations, which I then noted next to the relevant parts of the image.

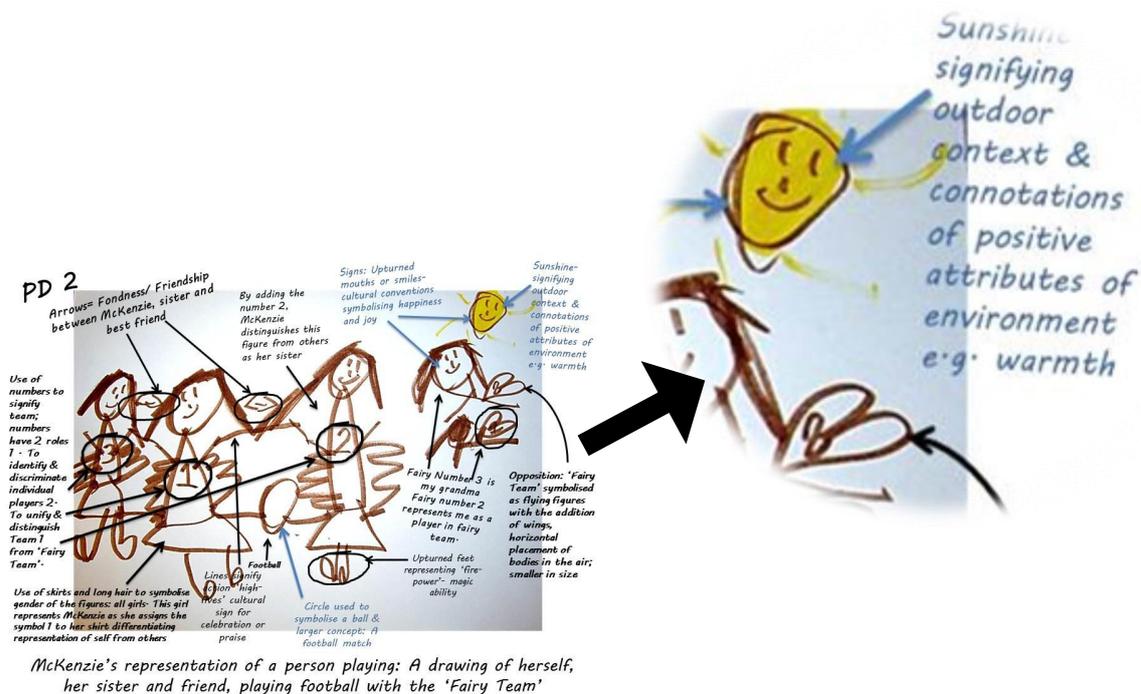


**Figure 5.4:** Version one of Charlotte's drawing (left) - the original image which was used along with the transcription generated by the drawing process. Version two of Charlotte's drawing (right) - an example of how I applied the explicit meaning assigned by children to particular aspects of the representations, which I then noted next to the relevant parts of the image.

I have endeavoured to clearly distinguish between drawings that were annotated by using a degree of my own interpretations, and those which are solely the child's interpretations. What I mean by the child's interpretation is that they explicitly articulated meaning through a description or comment made during conversation and narrative generated by the drawing process. This was achieved by using different coloured inks to represent children's labels and narratives and the researcher's interpretations. I have highlighted this distinction throughout my analysis by using *blue* ink to document *my* interpretations and suggestions of signification, and *black* ink to

symbolise the meaning articulated by the child through their stories, explanations and labels assigned to various elements in their drawings. Alternatively, if working in black and white for printing or publishing then the distinction can be made using italics or uppercase font styles for the researcher's interpretation while the child's descriptions can remain in normal font. The annotated drawings are therefore a fusion of my interpretations *and* the child's.

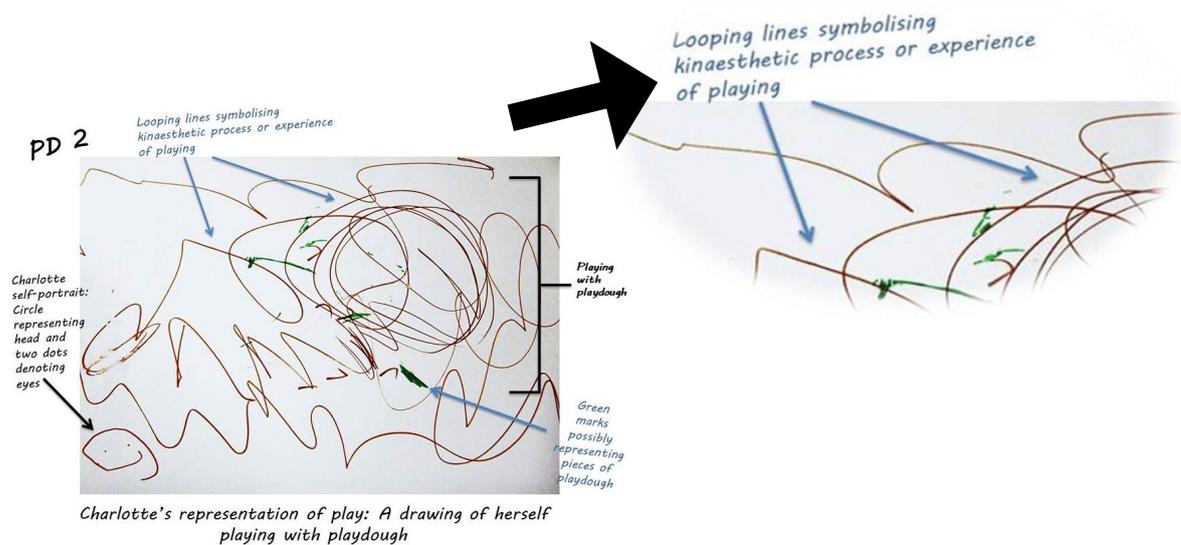
In some cases, such as McKenzie, it was not that I assigned new meaning to her representations, but instead, I interpreted them in the wider context of the play scene. For example, if we refer to Figure 5.5, for the purposes of my discussion I have drawn attention to a specific aspect of McKenzie's drawing: the sun. McKenzie did explicitly describe this image as the sun as she began colouring it: '...colour this in as the sun....' (Transcription, 25<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2010). The blue arrow next to McKenzie's sun is *my*



**Figure 5.5:** An example of how I annotated certain aspects of McKenzie's drawing using my own interpretation while referring to social semiotic underpinnings, such as drawing from cultural conventions of visual meaning (see 5.7 for a larger version).

interpretation of what this feature of the drawing signified in relation to the overall scene, which I have noted next to the arrow. In other words, although she assigned meaning to the image (the sun), she did not state that she was drawing the sun so that I could interpret the play as occurring outside. Nonetheless, by using social semiotics, we can embed the sign in the social in that she drew a culturally conventional representation in the scene which signifies an outdoor environment and suggests a positive environment rather than her other indoor scenes which featured conventional indoor representations such as carpets, doors and curtains. Furthermore, if we refer to her other drawings, she does not create fantasy lands where the sunshine can be indoors or mountains have curtains. Her drawings always represent a context which replicates that of reality.

In contrast, Charlotte did not specify what the scribbles meant. She only made reference to the scene as a whole representing 'playing with playdough'. For this



**Figure 5.6:** An example of how I annotated certain aspects of Charlotte's drawing using my own interpretation while referring to social semiotic underpinnings (see 5.8 for a larger version).

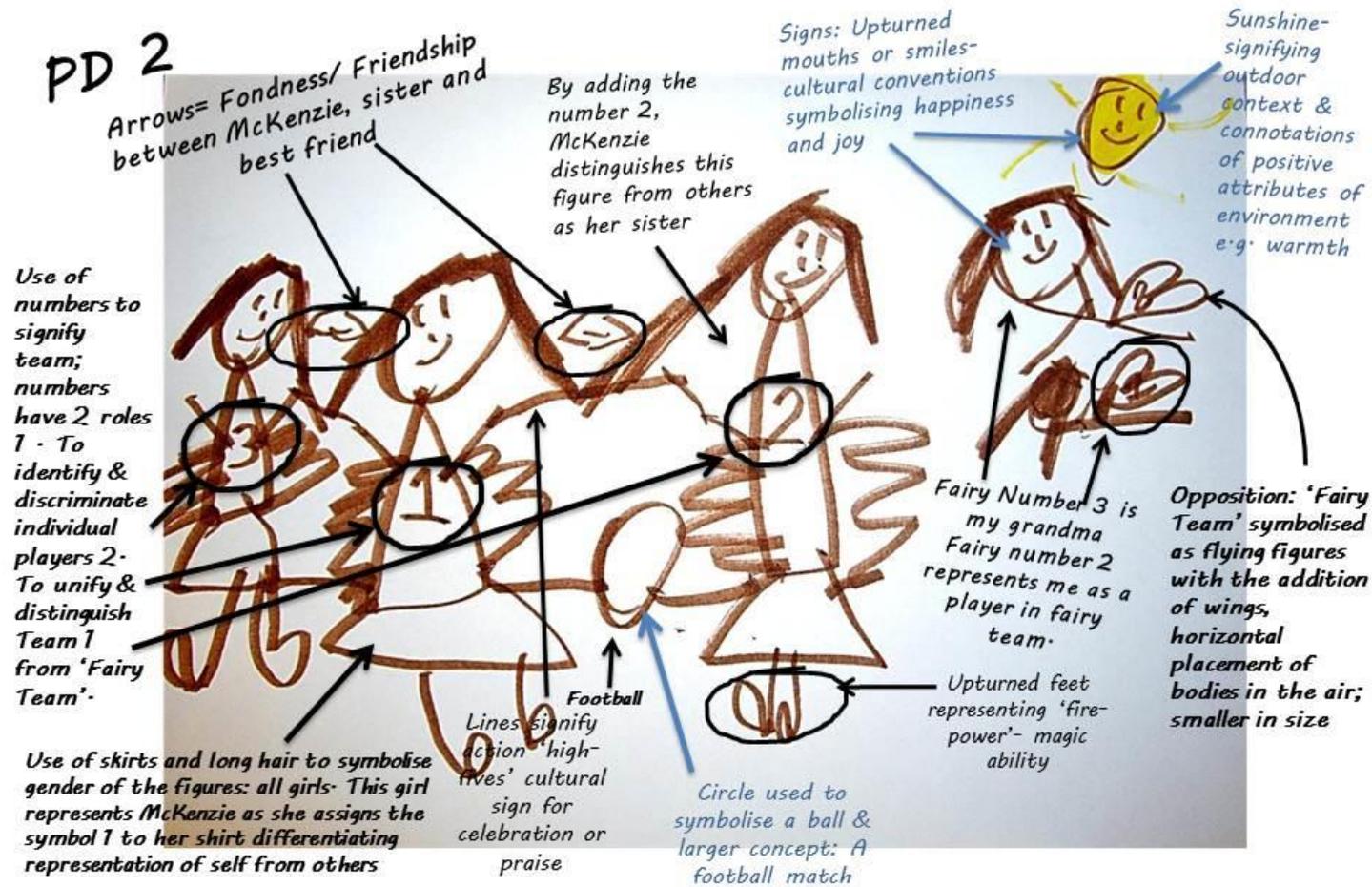
reason, it is my own interpretation (marked by the blue arrow and blue text in Figure 5.6) that the looping lines as well as the physicality of producing them, represent the act of playing as the lines have not been made into solid shapes suggesting an object such as playdough, but rather free flowing movement.

This approach minimised the possibilities of misinterpretation of the child's meanings and attempts to articulate what one does during a complex semiotic analysis of children's drawings. The distinction between the researcher's and the child's signification was an essential element of the analysis, ensuring the approach privileged the child's signification rather than my interpretations of sign-production.

It is important to note that all data were analysed after all the data had been collected. Therefore children had no part in the annotation. For this reason, the video transcripts were an important part of the annotation process. The children's recorded conversations generated during the drawing process constituted real-life annotation of their own drawings so I could annotate the drawings using children's own, explicit meanings assigned to various aspects of the images.

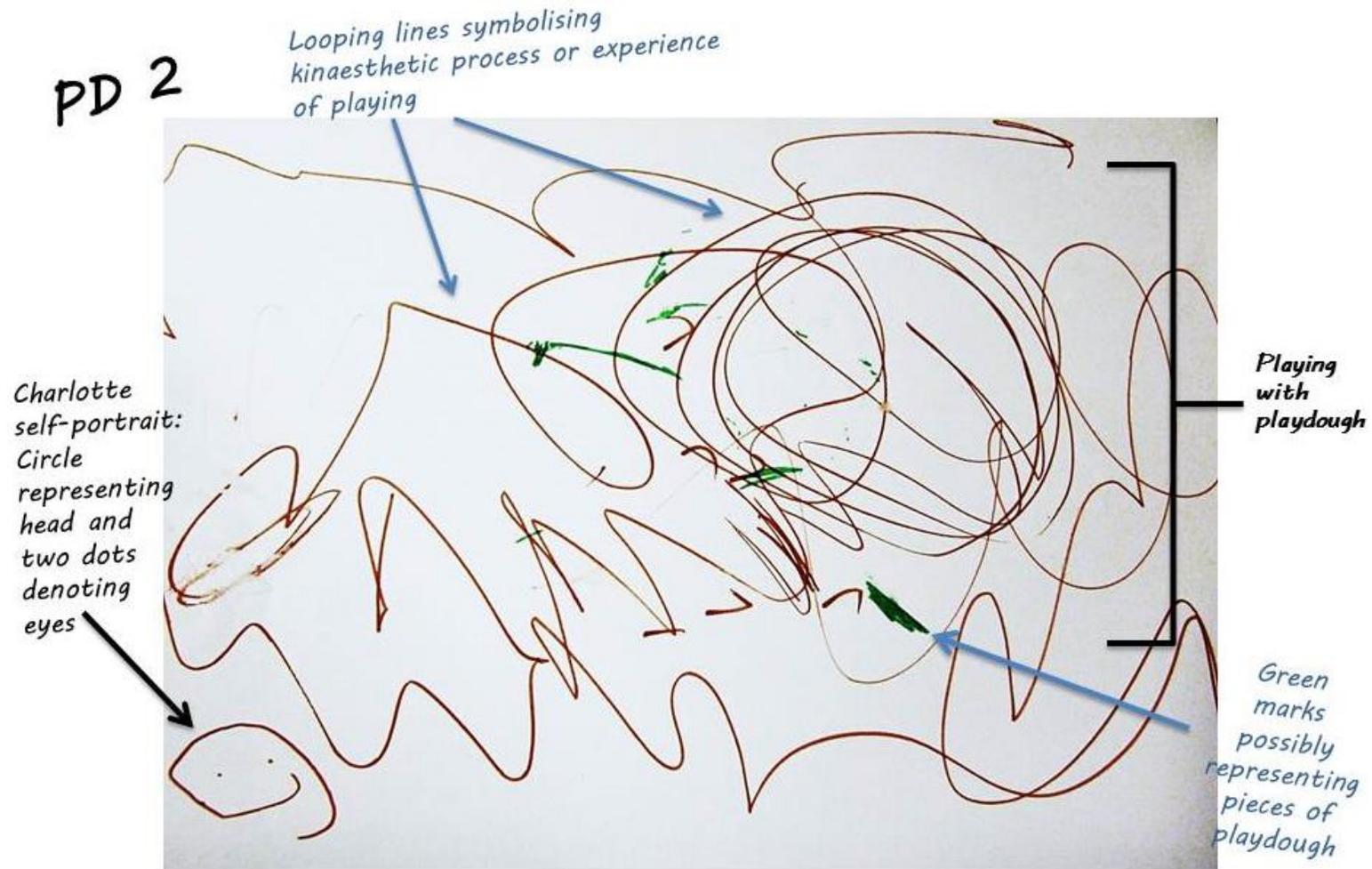
Step one also allowed me to familiarise myself with the data as a whole.

**Figure 5.7:** Step 1 of semiotic analysis on McKenzie's drawing. Researcher's manual annotation to identify signs using transcription of child's narrative generated during drawing process.



*McKenzie's representation of a person playing: A drawing of herself, her sister and friend, playing football with the 'Fairy Team'*

**Figure 5.8:** Step 1 of semiotic analysis on Charlotte's drawing. Researcher's manual annotation to identify signs using transcription of child's narrative generated during drawing process.



*Charlotte's representation of play: A drawing of herself playing with playdough*

## **Step 2: Isolating signs**

The visual elements I had identified as signs in step 1 (Figures 5.7 and 5.8) were isolated in order to perform a more in-depth analysis. This step of analysis provides a structured method of organising signs with their intended or interpreted meanings. It is in this step where I began an in-depth examination of the signs through a social semiotic lens in that signs are always embedded in the social. The objective is to capture and illustrate what the representations meant to the child by exploring the image or idea linked to what they have drawn (as shown in Figures 5.9 and 5.10). From a social semiotic perspective

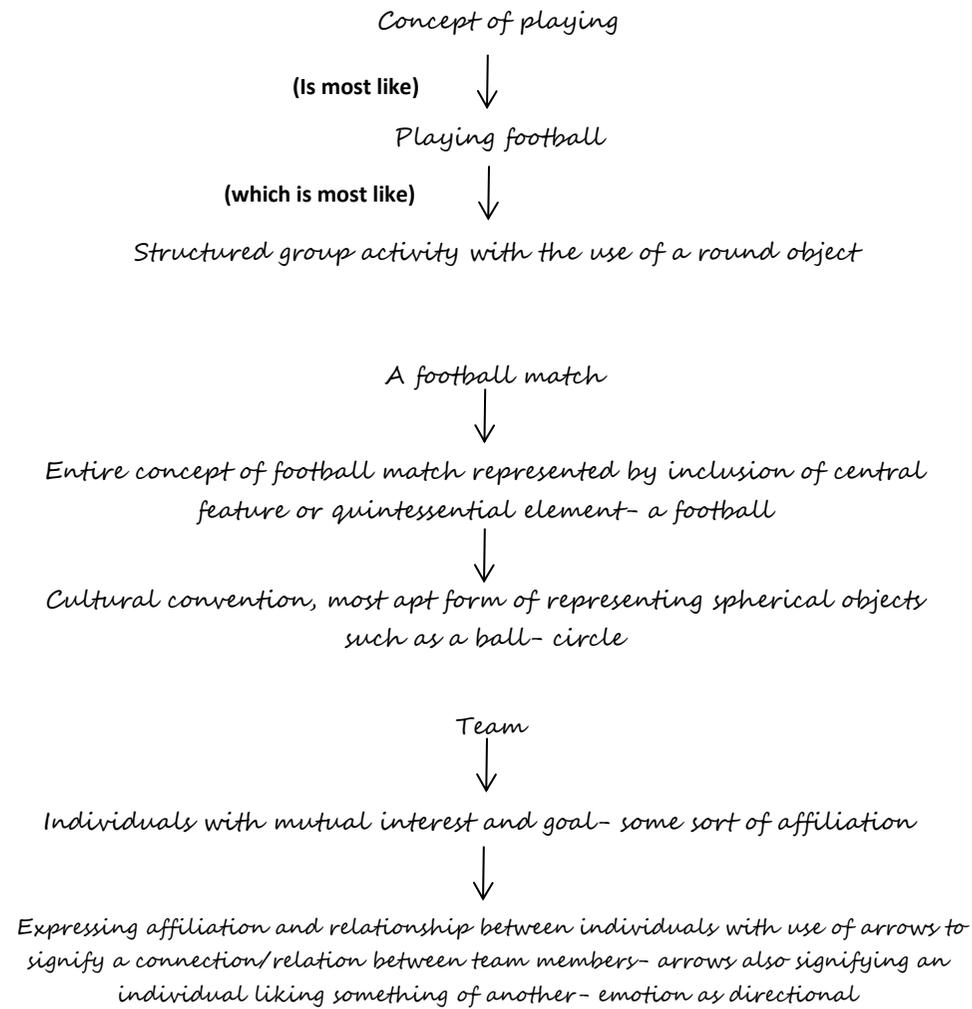
Signs are motivated relations of form and meaning, or to use semiotic terminology, of signifiers and signified. Makers of signs use those forms for the expression of their meaning which best suggest or carry meaning, and they do so in any medium in which they make signs. (Kress, 1997:12)

Therefore, 'the process of sign-making is the process of the constitution of metaphor in two steps' (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996:7). This entails the signified (the meaning that the sign represents or meaning to be expressed) and the signifier (the form in which it is expressed- this could be colour, shapes, lines, perspective, text). As there are different levels of metaphors, we can examine drawing as a whole in that the child sees playing as most like a game of football, which is most like a group activity involving a ball, or more specific aspects of the representation such as a ball being represented as a circle.

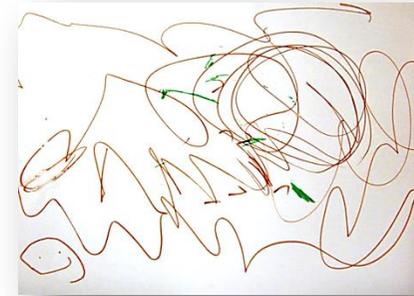
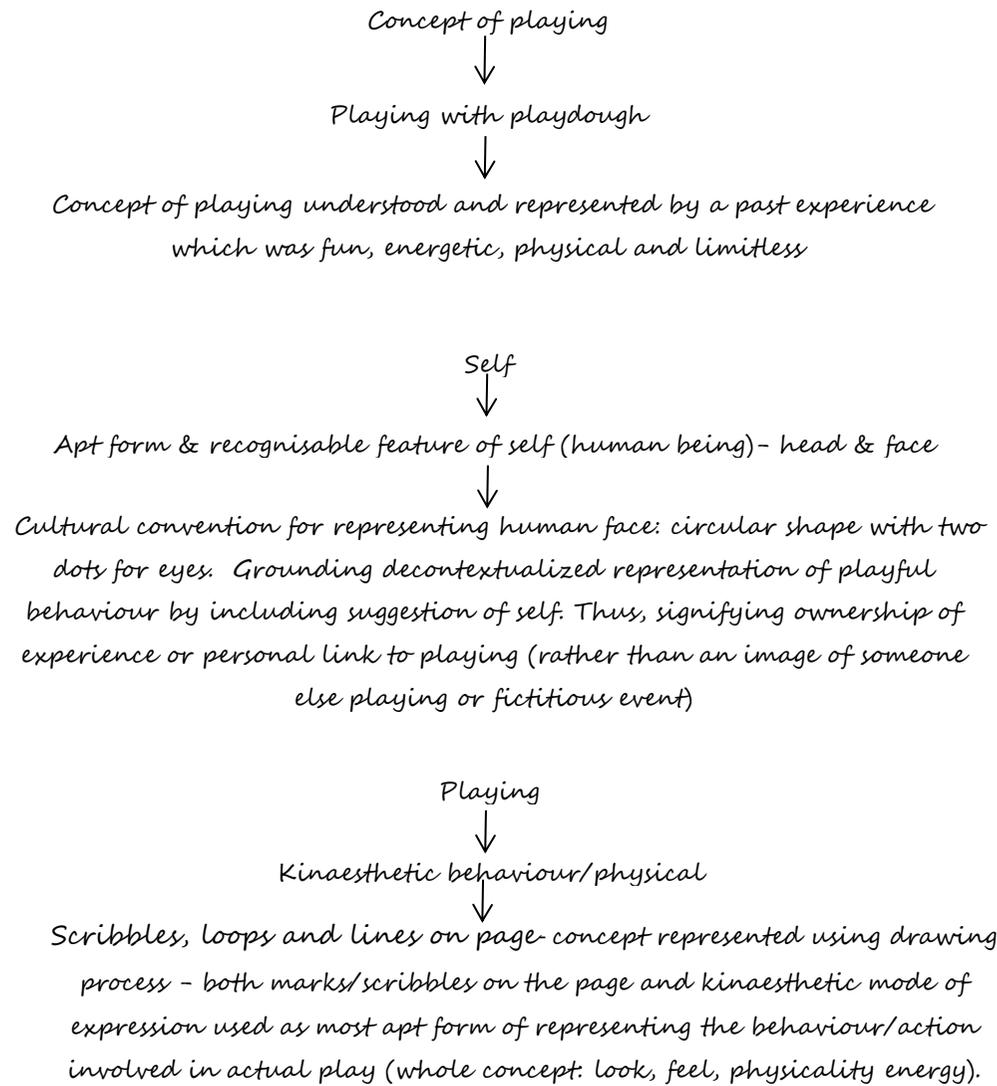
It is important to note that the three elements of the child's drawing which I have focused on in Figures 5.9 and 5.10 are given as examples of how three of the signs identified in step 1 are displayed and analysed in step 2. The process of analysis shown in Figures 5.9 and 5.10 was carried out on each of the signs identified in step one resulting in several pages of analysis for each child's drawing. For example, Figure 5.9 is only one page of the analysis I

carried out as part of step 2 of the 4-SASA on McKenzie's drawing. In the remaining sheets I also covered the other signs identified in step one such as the numbers on the team's vests and the contextual information suggested by the sun. These are discussed in step 3 of analysis where the signs are organised in the semiotic analysis worksheets.

**Figure 5.9:** Step 2 of semiotic analysis of McKenzie's prompted drawing with a focus on three specific aspects of the drawing.



**Figure 5.10:** Step 2 of semiotic analysis of Charlotte's prompted drawing focusing on three specific aspects of the drawing.



### Step 3: Organising signs

The third step of analysis involved organising the identified signs and accompanying meanings into categories relating to sign production. This was achieved using a semiotic analysis worksheet [SAW] as illustrated in Figure 5.11. The worksheet was created to encompass a range of categories as defined by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996). I used printed versions of the blank worksheet for each of the drawings. I used these worksheets alongside the other steps of analysis and transcriptions, writing the analysis in the blank right hand columns. My written analysis has been distinguished in this digital presentation of the worksheet in Figures 5.12 and 5.13 with the use of a handwriting font.

The objective of the third step was to analyse signs with consideration to the child's possible motivation and interest for specific sign production. Each sign was examined within social semiotic categories of visual analysis. These included: sign content, the social purpose of production, and aspects of representations such as salience, size, or colour.

In communication we rarely represent an object in full (i.e. include all of its features). The tendency would be to include only the most important or '*critical aspects*' (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996) of the object or scene to be represented. The objective for the creator is to produce a representation which contains adequate or essential information necessary for a message to be correctly interpreted: 'In other words, it is never the 'whole object' but only ever its critical aspects which are represented' (Ibid: 6). Critical aspects of an object or concept are motivated both by the child's interest and what is available and appropriate for communication within that context. For example, if I was not present then a child may choose to add more specific details to ensure correct interpretation of a concept in the absence of the observer. A ball may not be sufficient for conveying a football match;

hence a child may also include goal posts and the markings of a football pitch. From a social semiotic perspective, sign production as well as interpretation is influenced and guided by social factors, specific contexts, and cultures. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) describe this process of sign production as generating 'motivated expressions' or 'motivated signs'. When considering these factors in the analysis of children's representations, these motivated signs can be seen as a suggestion of the child's views and interests in the world on account of their production being motivated by both the immediate context, and by what the child identifies as the most accepted or plausible sign within the culture and its traditionally accepted visual forms of representation.

<b>Child's name:</b>	
<b>Date of data collection:</b>	
<b>CATEGORIES OF ANALYSIS</b>	<b>SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF CHILD'S DRAWING</b>
<b>Function and social purpose of sign:</b> why the sign was created, the audience, & intended objective or message to be conveyed (e.g. a card for a friend's birthday, or spontaneous drawing).	
<b>Sign content:</b> use and presentation of signs in the creation of the overall image (distance, size, composition, salience etc.).	
<b>Criterial aspects of image:</b> certain aspects of representations are perceived as important or 'criterial' for successful and suitable communication of meaning (e.g. criterial aspects of a human figure are a head, body, as well as facial features such as eyes or mouth).	
<b>Use of other modes</b> (colour, gestures, text, sound-song, speech).	
<b>Motivation &amp; interest:</b> Interest influencing sign production. Child will select signs within that context (for specific situation/ audience) according to their own interests and motivations e.g. motivated by own interests such as favourite characters, or what they can draw well.	

**Figure 5.11:** An example of the semiotic analysis worksheet (SAW) which I developed to structure the semiotic analysis. This was used with each child's drawing. The drawing was analysed within each semiotic category (in left shaded, column) and the information from analysis was added (by hand) to the relevant blank fields.

<b>Child's name:</b> MCKENZIE <b>Date of data collection:</b> 25 <sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2010	
<b>CATEGORIES OF ANALYSIS</b>	<b>SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF CHILD'S DRAWING</b>
Function and social purpose of sign	Prompted line drawing produced to represent a person playing
Sign content	<p>A football. 5 x players-divided into 2 teams. Figures representing self, sister, friends and me; arrows drawn between the figures to represent fondness for each other. All facing outwards inviting viewer into the scene at a personal level. Arms outstretched towards each other signifying action and interaction between various individuals. 'High-fives' signify celebration or praise between players.</p> <p>Smiling sunshine-signifying positive context, anthropomorphism</p>
Criteria aspects	<p>Sun- viewed as criterial feature to convey idea of the outdoors (and contextualising scene) - central sign indicating outdoor context of the play scene. The only aspect of drawing which had a specific (and culturally conventional i.e. correct) colour- yellow</p> <p>Sister, self and best friend- significant individuals within the play scene</p> <p>Ball- Most salient feature in scene. Central position, defined shape, football anchors the play scene as representing a specific sporting activity.</p> <p>Arrows- expressing feelings between individuals as articulated by McKenzie.</p>
Use of other modes	<p>Verbal narrative 'Here's the fairy team'</p> <p>Numbers on shirts to signify unity of the team (1-3), and discriminating between different team members i.e. two teams (Fairy vs. girls).</p> <p>Gestures, animating action from scene. Facial expression mimicking characters responses, role-play; sound effects 'Whoosh' (fire power)</p> <p>Limited use of colour - Only one colour used- McKenzie did not see this as a criterial aspect for representing play i.e. not necessary for interpreting overarching meaning</p>
Motivation & interest	<p>The inclusion of arrows as criterial aspect of play scene may be motivated by close bond with sister/ family, therefore included in her play- Arrows possibly representing concept of friendship in an abstract way therefore friendship may be considered a quintessential aspect of play. Possibly influenced by context where drawing produced thus choosing to draw a sport which could be viewed as an explicit representation of someone playing rather than something more abstract. Social interest, views play and drawing as socially rewarding. Inclusion of high-fives demonstrate understanding of sports and team games/ cultural conventions of team players celebrating/victories- motivated by desire to express winning and achievement- positive experiences in play</p>

**Figure 5.12:** Step 3 of analysis. Example SAW used with McKenzie's prompted drawing.

<b>Child's Name:</b> CHARLOTTE <b>Date of data collection:</b> 17 <sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY 2011	
CATEGORIES OF ANALYSIS	SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF CHILD'S DRAWING
Function and social purpose of sign	Prompted line drawing produced to represent a person playing
Sign content	<p>Circular shape with two dots- conventional representation of human face. Face is also very prominent in the image as it is the only representational form- i.e. drawn to represent something specific in reality- human face. Framing- it is positioned at the bottom left corner- possibly included as an afterthought</p> <p>Scribbles most salient- cover largest surface area-distinctive style. Used as metaphor to represent act of playing (specifically, with some playdough) as well as simply being produced as a result of behavioural representation of playing. Movement of scribbling as significant as the actual scribbles produced.</p> <p>Creative quality of image reflects creative quality of playing with playdough. Limited use of colour- only to differentiate small marks</p>
Criteria aspects	<p>Circular scribbles-producing visual and behavioural representations of Charlotte's conceptualisation of playing</p> <p>Smiley face/Self-portrait- anchors the play scene in reality; representing Charlotte playing with the playdough rather than it being a fictional event. Embedding abstract representation in reality and personal experience. Absence of body- possibly considering it unnecessary for suggestion of human presence- in other words, face is criteria aspect of human form</p>
Use of other modes	Gestures, facial expression, body posture and movement, arm action verbalised visual meaning 'this is playing with playdough'
Motivation & interest	Motivated by favourite activity at nursery. Representation of play motivated by primary interest in play: the positive experience. Represents most significant aspect of the activity i.e. the dynamic, energetic, fun element of play- interest influencing how play is conveyed- behavioural as well as visual image

**Figure 5.13:** Step 3 of analysis. Example SAW used with Charlotte's prompted drawing.

#### Step 4: Synthesis of criterial aspects

Step 4 involved filtering out aspects of sign production and motivated signs identified in step 3 specifically relating to the topic of interest: in this case, play. As with step 3, I created a document which was used to record this stage of analysis (Figures 5.14 and 5.15). The primary focus here was achieving my second research objective: to obtain children's perspectives on play. Therefore, step four was a selective process, examining the choices underlying the criterial aspects of children's representations (what to include or exclude in regard to illustrating play) and the associated signification. This enabled me to construct a summary of the child's views and concepts relating to play.

<p><b>CHILD'S NAME: McKenzie</b></p> <p><b>DRAWING DETAILS: Prompted drawing- McKenzie playing football</b></p>
<p align="center"><b>SUMMARY OF CHILD'S PERSPECTIVES ON PLAY</b></p> <p>A synthesis of child's perspectives from steps 1-3 with focus on information relating to play</p>
<p>Concept of play understood and represented as a group activity. Perceived as a fun activity carried out with other individuals you like (friends/family). Further elements of play considered significant in its conceptualisation are competition, a positive/pleasant environment, stimulating activity, feelings of belonging and loyalty to own team. Related to outdoors and enjoys using imagination in play. Overall, viewed as social practice which one engages and forms basis of friendship and kinship.</p>

**Figure 5.14:** Step 4 of semiotic analysis on McKenzie's drawing. Summary of the child's perspectives on play based on step 1- 3 of semiotic analysis.

<b>CHILD'S NAME:</b>	<b>Charlotte</b>
<b>DRAWING DETAILS:</b>	<b>Prompted drawing- playing with playdough</b>
<b>SUMMARY OF CHILD'S PERSPECTIVES ON PLAY</b>	
A synthesis of child's perspectives from steps 1-3 with focus on information relating to play	
Viewing play in this instance as a positive experience produced by a physical act. Suggesting qualities of play which are fundamental to her such as freedom of behaviour, energetic, spontaneous, creative and dynamic. Conceptualisation of play is a fun activity-based experience. Experience is more significant than actual object played with.	

**Figure 5.15:** Step 4 of semiotic analysis on Charlotte's drawing. Summary of the child's perspectives on play based on step 1- 3 of semiotic analysis.

### **5.5. Children's perspectives on play: outcomes of the 4-SASA**

Together, the four steps provide a systematic and detailed description of children's representations enabling the researcher to interpret children's concepts, experiences, and understandings of play. Therefore, based on the four steps of analysis on McKenzie's prompted drawing in Figure 5.1, her perspectives on play can be summarised as follows:

- o Play is a social practice. In other words, what McKenzie searches out in this play experience is social interaction. She enjoys engaging with others rather than the focus of play being the use of objects. Overall, play is viewed as social practice in which one engages and can form the basis of friendship and kinship.

- o Significant elements of play include competition, achievement, a positive environment, conversation, belonging, loyalty and friendship.
- o Play is always embedded in reality. However, imaginative components can be part of play and are included in her real-life scenes such as playing football against a fairy team and individuals having special powers.
- o McKenzie's most significant play partners are family members, primarily her sister, and *best* friends.

Informed by the 4-SASA on Charlotte's prompted drawing in Figure 5.2, Charlotte's perspectives on play can be summarised as follows:

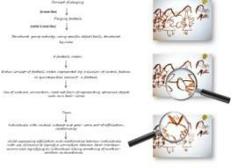
- o Play is an activity which involves another object.
- o Play reflects her favourite activities at nursery.
- o In this instance, Charlotte views play as a positive experience resulting from a physical act.
- o Significant qualities of play may be that it is dynamic, creative, energetic, playful and spontaneous.
- o Her conceptualisation of play is a fun, activity-based experience.

Once the steps were completed for each drawing, I would collate the analysis generated in the final step (Step 4: summary of child's perspectives on play) to synthesise a comprehensive account of the child's perspectives on play as revealed across all their drawings. The fusion of explicit meanings articulated by children during sign production and my interpretations based on conventional uses of signs, children's interests and personal or contextual motivations can be further explored to consider how these may be

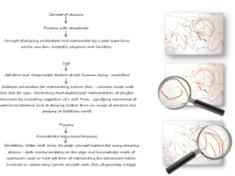
embedded in larger contexts of social and cultural practice and beliefs relating to definitions and images of play. Finally, I used naturally arising themes throughout children's drawings relating to play as the framework to present the children's perspectives in Chapter 6.

The entire process of analysis is shown in Tables 5.2 and 5.3 where I have outlined the analysis, beginning with a copy of the child's original drawing, to the final collation of analytical steps to construct a rich account of the child's perspectives on play.

**Table 5.2:** Outline of the 4-SASA of McKenzie’s drawings.

	<b>STEP 1</b>	<b>STEP 2</b>	<b>STEP 3</b>	<b>STEP 4</b>		
						
Begin with an A4 printout (from digital scans or photo files) of the child’s original drawing.	Identifying signs within drawings through manual annotations of the child’s conversation and descriptions of representations to ensure the child’s meaning is privileged.	Isolating individual signs which were identified in step 1 and documenting the child’s understanding of signs and social significance (in social semiotic terms: embedding the sign in the social).	Organising signs using specific categories of social semiotic analysis (mode, size, colour, salience) and identifying the child’s motivation and interest for specific sign production.	Synthesis of the child’s perspectives from steps 1-3, focusing on information relating to play and choices underlying the criterial aspects of representations (what to include or exclude to illustrate play). In sum, constructing a summary of the child’s perspectives and conceptions of play.	Collation of step 4 outcomes (summary of the child’s perspectives on play) from every drawing (of the same child) to produce a rich account of the child’s perspectives on play.	

**Table 5.3:** Outline of the 4-SASA on Charlotte’s drawings.

	<b>STEP 1</b>	<b>STEP 2</b>	<b>STEP 3</b>	<b>STEP 4</b>																				
				<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Child Name:</td> <td>CHARLOTTE</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Date of data collection:</td> <td>17 FEBRUARY 2011</td> </tr> <tr> <td>CATEGORIES OF ANALYSIS:</td> <td>SEMIO-TIC ANALYSIS OF CHILD'S DRAWING</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Location and social position of sign:</td> <td>Playdough on the table in the child's bedroom in a playroom</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Signifier:</td> <td>Playdough (the signifier)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Signified:</td> <td>Playdough (the signified)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Contextual aspects:</td> <td>Charlotte is a 4-year-old girl who is playing with playdough in her bedroom. She is sitting at a table and has a playdough figure in front of her. She is looking at the camera and smiling.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Use of other modes:</td> <td>Playdough (the signifier) is used to create a signified (the signified) which is a playdough figure.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Motivation &amp; Interest:</td> <td>Charlotte is interested in playdough and is using it to create a signified (the signified) which is a playdough figure.</td> </tr> </table>	Child Name:	CHARLOTTE	Date of data collection:	17 FEBRUARY 2011	CATEGORIES OF ANALYSIS:	SEMIO-TIC ANALYSIS OF CHILD'S DRAWING	Location and social position of sign:	Playdough on the table in the child's bedroom in a playroom	Signifier:	Playdough (the signifier)	Signified:	Playdough (the signified)	Contextual aspects:	Charlotte is a 4-year-old girl who is playing with playdough in her bedroom. She is sitting at a table and has a playdough figure in front of her. She is looking at the camera and smiling.	Use of other modes:	Playdough (the signifier) is used to create a signified (the signified) which is a playdough figure.	Motivation & Interest:	Charlotte is interested in playdough and is using it to create a signified (the signified) which is a playdough figure.		
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Signified:	Playdough (the signified)																							
Contextual aspects:	Charlotte is a 4-year-old girl who is playing with playdough in her bedroom. She is sitting at a table and has a playdough figure in front of her. She is looking at the camera and smiling.																							
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<p>Begin with an A4 printout (from digital scans or photo files) of the child’s original drawing.</p>	<p>Identifying signs within drawings through manual annotation using transcriptions of the child’s conversation and descriptions of representations to ensure the child’s meaning is privileged.</p>	<p>Isolating individual signs which were identified in step 1 and documenting the child’s understanding of signs and social significance (in social semiotic terms: embedding the sign in the social).</p>	<p>Organising signs using specific categories of social semiotic analysis (mode, size, colour, salience) and identifying the child’s motivation and interest for specific sign production.</p>	<p>Synthesis of the child’s perspectives from steps 1–3, focusing on information relating to play and choices underlying the criterial aspects of representations (what to include or exclude to illustrate play). In sum, constructing a summary of the child’s perspectives and conceptions of play.</p>	<p>Collation of step 4 outcomes (summary of the child’s perspectives on play) from every drawing (of same the child) to produce a rich account of the child’s perspectives on play.</p>																			

## **5.6. Summary**

This Chapter described my innovative method of analysis by detailing the four-step approach developed for the semiotic analysis of children's drawings.

The application of social semiotics to the analysis of young children's drawings offered many benefits. The underpinning theory meant that the process of drawing was acknowledged as a process rather than focusing on the final product. As messages are always embedded in the social, it allows researchers to take the meanings children convey through the drawing process and interpret them within the wider contexts of social relations and social practices. Therefore, what is perceived by children as well as what is expressed through their choice of representations will bear some reflection of the concepts and ideas existing within society and the cultural practices which are unique to the child, their drawings and their play.

My approach offers researchers an analytical tool to facilitate the interpretation of children's perspectives as revealed through their drawings. Although the approach I have devised by using and adapting what I interpreted from Kress and van Leeuwen's social semiotic framework may have been ambitious, the main value of the 4-SASA of drawings is that it allows for the child's own signification to be at the forefront of analysis. The steps systematically construct the child's perspective on play by integrating his/her verbal responses where the child explicitly assigns meaning to, or expresses his/her understanding of the sign, and criterial aspects of the image which have been chosen to represent the concept of play. These steps result in a synthesis of

meaning, conveyed through a myriad of modes, concluding in a socially embedded and unique view of the child's perspective on play.

Indeed, there is still a level of subjectivity due to the nature of qualitative approaches as well as reading visual images, and it is not definitive. Nevertheless, my 4-SASA offers a principled technique for the use of social semiotics. This framework and theoretical perspective lends itself to the processes and practices of children's meaning-making and so provides a strong foundation for analysing young children's drawings.

## **CHAPTER 6. CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVES ON PLAY**

In the following discussion, I return to the third research question: what can drawings reveal about children's perspectives on play? Accordingly, Chapter 6 focuses on the outcomes of my 4-step approach to the semiotic analysis of children's drawings (4-SASA). I begin the chapter with an overview of each child's perspectives on play as revealed by their drawings and the results from the data collection. This includes the number of drawings generated by each child and their representations of play produced during the prompted drawing activity. I also provide a brief discussion on the topic of play and how this can be a challenging concept to define and represent. The remainder of the chapter covers children's perspectives on play, considering themes such as children's conceptualisations of play and significant aspects of play for the child.

Here it is important to specify what I mean by children's perspectives on play. I use perspectives on play because it allows me to explore all aspects of play from the child's point of view: considering past experiences, their definitions of play, the value of play, significant components of play episodes and so forth. As a result, my approach provided opportunities to explore what children liked to play (for instance, Charlie loved playing with vehicles) and, at the same time, discover how a child may conceptualise play (such as McKenzie's idea of play as a social practice).

Play could be considered an elusive concept. However, it does relate to children's experiences and is a significant part of their everyday lives. Subsequently, children produced a wide range of representations to convey their perspectives on play. These varied from drawing objects to illustrate their favourite toys or play things, to more complex representations of play scenes and abstract concepts.

The focus of my study is to explore *drawing* as a method of gathering children's perspectives. For this reason, I base my accounts of children's play exclusively on the child's drawings and drawing process which included children's narratives generated by the drawing activities. On occasion I use photographs to elaborate what children have drawn, enabling readers to visualise references I make to the related characters, toys or games.

### **6.1. Play: an elusive concept**

As stated in 1.2.2, the reasons for choosing play as the subject of children's drawings were as follows: (i) to offer children a meaningful research activity to investigate the issues surrounding the use of drawing as a research tool, (ii) to explore the task of representing an abstract (yet familiar) concept, and how this may influence children's drawing process and representations, and (iii) to serve as an extension of the ESRC project 'Young Children Learning with Toys and Technology at Home' (Plowman *et al.*, 2012) by giving greater emphasis to children's own perspectives on play and the ways in which this can be achieved.

Play is renowned for being an elusive concept which has been defined and conceptualised in many ways. Play has been described as ambiguous (Sutton-Smith, 1997), a hallowed concept (Cheng & Johnson, 2010; Pellegrini & Boyd, 1993), elusive (Ailwood, 2003; Harker, 2005; Lindqvist, 2001), ephemeral (Moyle, 2005), and, at times, 'a controversial topic of study' (Pellegrini, 2009:131). Therefore, play has many definitions and meanings. The complex nature of play is made apparent by the extensive literature attempting to define and discuss this concept which include: the seminal work of Sutton-Smith (1997) in 'The Ambiguity of Play', Grieshaber and McArdle's (2010) 'The Trouble with Play', 'Play is a Complex Landscape' (Worthington, 2010) and 'Rethinking Play and Pedagogy' (Rogers, 2011).

When play is discussed or observed, it is not uncommon to think, 'Play cannot just be; it has to have a purpose' (Cohen, 2006:2). However, the purpose of play is a widely disputed topic. It is argued that the ways in which we understand play and its value differs across cultures and over time (Cheng & Johnson, 2010; Sandberg & Vuorinen, 2010), and according to societies' conceptualisations of childhood (Woodhead, 1998). Saracho (1991) suggests that the difficulty in finding a universal definition for play is because it has very different functions and meanings for different individuals and cultures. Consequently, the continuing issues in play research have given rise to conflicting and competing definitions and descriptions of its value, purpose, and characteristics (Cheng & Johnson, 2010; Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010).

The characteristics of play have been described in various ways. For example some have suggested it is, 'creative and liberating, critical and active; but it can be repetitive, violent, reinforce the status quo or take the form of thinking, wishing or daydreaming as

well' (Meire, 2007:1). Others have described play as symbolic, meaningful, pleasurable, intrinsically motivated, rule-governed, episodic (Fromberg, 1987 cited in Sutton-Smith, 1997), 'dynamic, active, constructive behaviour' (Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2002:33), fun and pleasurable; and that children are 'born to play' (Jarvis, 2010:64). However, it has been argued that these are inaccurate descriptions and characteristics as many activities are enjoyable and not defined as play; and many forms of play or play experiences, such as losing in a race or game, can be very disagreeable (Vygotsky, 1978). Other early childhood authors question whether these definitions are 'taken-for-granted' understandings of play and that play is not always educational, fun, nor innocent (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010:1). Nonetheless, play is recognised as a basic right of every child (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1989:Article 31). The value of play in children's lives is also reflected in the Early Years Framework (EYF) which maintains that play is central to children's learning. For this reason, one of the main objectives is ensuring that children have 'the right to a high quality of life and access to play' (Early Years Framework, 2008:4). Similarly, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) describes play as a key characteristic of effective learning (EYFS Development Matters, 2012).

Despite the reference to play in various educational policies and curricula, certain forms of play in particular contexts can be viewed negatively. For instance, within more structured educational contexts, free play can have associations with limited adult control and unclear outcomes (Wood, 2010:15) or seen as silly and frivolous (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010), and viewed as 'wasting time' and only offered to children once work had been completed (Youell, 2008:122). This suggests that the

purpose and value of play is not universal but situated and varied according to the context and the forms of play which are deemed appropriate.

Conceptualisations and definitions of play also differ within various disciplines and perspectives. Theories of play vary from conceptualising it along a continuum (Pellegrini, 1991), to more categorical approaches within cognitive developmental theories such as Piaget's, as well as a number of other theories conceptualising play such as arousal modulation theories of play, biogenetic theories, and psychoanalytic theories (Louw & Botha, 1998). Some authors focus on alternative approaches to discussing play rather than attempting formal definitions. For instance, Sutton-Smith (1997) describes seven different rhetorics of play which include: progress, fate, power, identity, self, imaginary, and frivolity. He also suggests the manifestations of these rhetorics and the function they play for the individual. For instance, he describes 'progress' appearing in forms such as play and games with the function of adaptation and socialisation, while the rhetoric of 'imaginary' manifests in the form of fantasy play with its primary function being creativity and flexibility. In contrast, Ailwood (2003) discusses three discourses of play which dominate early childhood literature: the romantic and nostalgic, the developmental, and discourses on the characteristics of play. Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century research on play has focused on: the cognitive, the social, and the emotional value of play (Cohen, 2006). Some of the most notable theorists who supported the value of play in these areas of development include Erikson, Froebel, Freud, and Piaget (Aldridge *et al.*, 2012).

Educational benefits associated with play include its role in healthy brain development (Tamis-LeMonda *et al.*, 2004), social interplay (Vickerius & Sandberg, 2006), learning

(Wood, 2010), and children's exploration and seeing the world in new ways (Wright, 2010). Others address its value in: developing abstract thinking and the use of symbols (Worthington, 2010), children's imaginative and cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978), physical development, dexterity, and emotional strength (Ginsburg *et al.*, 2007), and children's exploration of self-identify (Edmiston, 2008).

Research suggests that different forms of play can provide children with different benefits. For instance, risk and adventurous play can develop children's confidence and emotional well-being (Stephenson, 2003), and pretend play is an important means of developing children's creativity (Russ *et al.*, 1999). The notion that play can facilitate the development of children's divergent thinking, problem solving and creativity is influenced by theorists such as Piaget and Vygotsky. Indeed, some have claimed that play itself is a natural form of creativity (Fein, 1987), and that play can foster children's flexible thinking and creative engagement (Sutton-Smith, 2001; Wheeler *et al.*, 2002).

Despite the extensive research on play, its unique benefits to the child or its developmental qualities remain difficult to prove. Some authors argue it is 'difficult to isolate the benefits of play from other causal determinants' (Howard, 2010:145); others stress that the significance of play and its benefits in children's lives is purely theoretical (Bennett *et al.*, 1997). These arguments are based on the fact that many classical theories are simply philosophical reflections based on informal observations. Consequently, there is a lack of definitive empirical evidence for the importance of play in child development and well-being. For this reason, there are continuing tensions as to the exact purpose and value of play.

This brief discussion highlights the complexity of play and suggests that it remains a contested subject. The varied, and at times contradictory, uses of the term 'play' can prove problematic to educators, parents and researchers.

## **6.2. An overview of the drawing data**

Over the course of two visits, a total of ninety-eight drawings was gathered. Sixty of these drawings were produced by children during my visits: fifteen prompted drawings (PD) and forty-five free drawings (FD). The remainder of the drawings were those collected as records of drawings produced outwith the research context. These were usually displayed around the house or kept from past activities by parents. These last drawings are termed past free drawings (PDF). Table 6.1 provides a breakdown of data collected. The number of drawings *produced* per child over the two visits ranged from as low as three, to over ten drawings. Drawings varied greatly in complexity, level of abstraction and time invested in their production. The diversity of representations was visible both between children as well as within drawings produced by the same child. For example, Figure 6.1 demonstrates the more abstract drawings produced by children compared to some of the more realistic representations.

Although prompted drawings offered great insight into children's perspectives on play, a large part of the meaning associated with the drawing data was accessed through the accompanying narrative rather than through the image alone. Furthermore, play would often feature in children's free drawings (Figures 6.2 and 6.3), suggesting that it was a central part of their daily lives: playing with friends, family, pets, games, objects and toys, representing what they enjoyed doing.



**Figure 6.1:** Charlotte's more abstract representation of play: the act of playing with playdough (left). Eva's representation of her horse and her puppy playing (right).



**Figure 6.2:** Charlotte's free drawing representing playing with her family.



**Figure 6.3:** McKenzie's free drawing representing an outdoor play scene with her sister, puppy and a fish.

CHILD	PD	FD	PFD	TOTAL FD + PD	TOTAL DRAWINGS
Eva	2	3	26	5	31
McKenzie	2	10	5	12	17
Charlie	2	10	1	12	13
Tyler	1	8	2	9	11
Fynn	2	8	0	10	10
Charlotte	2	1	4	3	7
Ethan	2	3	0	5	5
Mia	2	2	0	4	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>98</b>

**Table 6.1:** Breakdown of drawing data collected by means of three methods (organised by largest to lowest number of drawings collected): Prompted drawings (PD), Children's spontaneous free drawings (FD), and those collected outwith the research context (displayed around the house or kept from past activities by parents). These last drawings are termed past free drawings (PFD).

### *6.2.1. Prompted drawing*

Drawings produced during the prompted drawing activity in the second visit were defined as 'prompted drawings' (PD) as they were generated in response to two prompt questions. These were designed as a means of inviting children to represent their perspectives on play through drawings. These prompt questions are reiterated in Table 6.2, as well as the correlating drawing responses as defined by the children themselves. The drawings produced during the PD activity demonstrated a variety of interpretations of the prompt question. The representations of play produced as a result of the prompt

question ranged from drawing objects illustrating their favourite toys, complex play scenes and activities, to more abstract visual representations of play.

CHILD (alphabetical order)	RESPONSE TO PQ <sup>6</sup> 1 "Will you draw anything you can think of when you hear the word 'play'"	RESPONSE TO PQ 2 "Will you draw a person playing"	ADDITIONAL PROMPTS OR DEVELOPMENT OF PQ
<b>CHARLIE</b>	Self-portrait- playing in garden	<sup>7</sup> Worm sleeping	Developed PQ 1: Suggested he could draw himself playing something
<b>CHARLOTTE</b>	PD 1: A football PD 2: Herself playing with playdough	No response	Suggestion from her mother as to what she likes to play
<b>ETHAN</b>	Playing with playdough	Man playing football	Repeated PQ 2
<b>EVA</b>	PD 1: Pony/ unicorn & dog playing PD 2: Draws a picture of herself with horse	No drawing produced, instead she shows me DVDs which you can 'play'	No additional prompts
<b>FYNN</b>	Drawing of self with various articles: a stick, treasure map, banana skins and bean bags	A scene from his Indiana Jones computer game	No additional prompts
<b>MCKENZIE</b>	Picture of a plane	Playing football outside with friends and sister against the Fairy Team	No additional prompts
<b>MIA</b>	Baby Annabelle doll in a bubble bath	Drawing of me (researcher) playing with a ball	Developing PQ 1 by asking her what she likes to play
<b>TYLER</b>	Person playing with toys	No response	No additional prompts

**Table 6.2:** Details of prompted drawings produced by children.

<sup>6</sup> PQ: Prompt question for prompted drawing (PD) activity

<sup>7</sup> The drawing responses are described using the child's own description and assignment of meaning

### **6.2.2. Free drawing**

Over the course of the two visits children produced numerous free drawings. These spontaneous drawings were instigated by the children themselves rather than created in response to prompts or direction from the researcher.

The essence of *free* drawing was clearly demonstrated through the variety of representations produced and the manner in which they were created. In other words, children were free to create whatever and however they chose. For instance, some drawings appeared in a matter of seconds, emerging from a fury of energetic scribbling, then immediately discarded in preparation for the next. Alternatively, children would spend extended periods of time on free drawings; methodically and thoughtfully creating a scene, sometimes asking me for suggestions, or simply conversing during this relaxed but focused activity.

Children's narration and commentary during the process of drawing varied greatly. For example, McKenzie and Eva habitually constructed complex scripts and plot, offering detailed information about characters, events, and representations existing far beyond the edges of the page. Others, such as Tyler, had a tendency to draw in silence and only offer functional commentary when I asked a question or he felt an explanation was necessary.

### **6.3. Children's perspectives on play: summary**

This section summarises each of the child's perspectives on play as concluded from step four of the 4-SASA (section 5.4). Step four involved the synthesis of steps 1-3 of

the analytical process where the analysis concentrated on what the child's drawing revealed about their perspectives on play. More detailed analysis and discussion is provided throughout the remainder of this chapter.

On the whole, the 4-SASA suggests that central aspects of play are: social interaction, pleasure, entertainment, achievement, and autonomy. These conclusions came about from aspects of children's drawings such as scenes of friends and family playing together, and scenes where individuals competed against each other or triumphed over evil. Many of the children's drawings had positive connotations. Characters were smiling and children's descriptions included positive words such as yummy, funny, pretty, or love. Children's narratives also were filled with emotions and traits such as excitement, engagement, and competition when describing characters or events within their scenes. Even when children's drawings were not overtly positive in appearance in the conventional sense such as characters smiling and the use of bright colours, the scenes were still described fondly by the child. Play was often linked to fun, playful behaviour, and enjoyable activities chosen by the child and shared with others.

### **Fynn**

Fynn draws from everyday practice such as the toys he plays with, games, and characters. His play involves concepts such as good and evil, and an 'us vs. them' approach to situations. Fynn's descriptions suggested a keen interest in artefacts pertaining to treasure and adventure as on multiple occasions he referred to maps, tools, treasures and valuable artefacts.

...it can turn into 3 things called: A treasure map... and gold.

Conversation and drawing with Fynn (Transcription, 30<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2010)

These interests may have been inspired by a favourite computer game character, Indiana Jones, who featured in Fynn's conversations and drawings. Even his self-portrait closely mirrored his earlier representation of Indiana Jones; using the same colours and the inclusion of useful tools and artefacts.

While drawing, Fynn talks about a friend called 'Lewis' having the same games as him suggesting that a significant aspect of friendship is mutual interests. However, this is the only reference to any friends and perhaps his own friends are not considered essential for play. Based on the 4-SASA, Fynn's drawings suggest that he is more interested in *what* was being played with, rather than with whom.

Play does not have to remain within the boundaries of reality. Fynn lets his imagination flow by including monsters (good and bad) and fantasy characters in his drawings. Things have the ability to transform into different objects and one can face opponents with no fear within the safe boundaries of imagination. Based on these drawings, play, for Fynn, is a forum for adventure and exploration.

### **Charlie**

Charlie's play is guided by his interest in vehicles and transport such as helicopters, trains, and trucks. These appeared throughout his drawings and my observations (Figures 6.12 and 8.5). Informed by the 4-SASA, his drawings suggest that the primary interest in play is not that of social interaction. Instead, he is interested in the actions of

objects, vehicles, or characters. For this reason, play is not something that requires other individuals as they were not featured in any of his drawings. From Charlie's perspective, play is about using and exploring objects of interest as well as engaging in playful behaviour such as his mischievous worm drawing or drawing a person frolicking in the garden. For Charlie, play can be silly, amusing, spontaneous, and occur outdoors.

During the drawing process, Charlie mentioned playing with a friend as well as engaging in more structured activities such as drawing and playing with playdough. However, both of these were mentioned in the context of playing at nursery and were not represented in any drawings suggesting that play may be construed differently depending on the context.

Other than one of his prompted drawings, Charlie's representations were never contextualised with specific backgrounds or extensive visual and verbal information. Play is not something that is quintessentially children's or human social practice as his drawings suggested that worms or snakes could play or be playful.

Although Charlie drew a television, he did not refer to it as a form of play in any sense. This may imply that play is viewed as more active, physical and playful behaviour.

### **Ethan**

Based on the 4-SASA, Ethan was aware that play can be a specific behaviour, 'He's playing with a football!' (Transcription, 24<sup>th</sup> Dec. 2010). His drawings also revealed an imaginative side to play where characters were brought to life by Ethan's narratives

and role-play. For example, he had asked me to draw a toilet next to the mouse in one of our drawings (Figure 7.1). He then added a beard to my representations and explained how his own toilet looked like this. After his mother questioned this claim, he stood up asserting that it did. Then he walked around like a zombie describing how the toilet wandered around at night just like his demonstration.

His representations are motivated by his favourite characters in his daily play repertoire which, in turn, is influenced by media and images which he was encountered in daily life. These included Pokémon, SpongeBob SquarePants and Company, and Ben 10 together with his various enemies. Ethan also explored realms of emotional and mental states drawing abstract concepts such as characters having 'scrambled thoughts' and colouring Squidward blue, on account of him being frozen.

He also offered a concrete representation of playing in response to one prompt question, choosing to draw a man playing football. Other than this one concrete conceptualisation of play, on the whole, Ethan saw anything and everything as play in that the criterial aspect of play was playful behaviour. For this reason, humour was a central part of play. He enjoyed any scenario, character or behaviour which was entertaining and amusing as he continually requested me to draw funny characters or he himself would adapt things in the scene to create quirky and amusing features. Characters were put into amusing predicaments or made to have silly expressions. He would then laugh and giggle at all these drawings. Upon drawing something generic and typical, he would adapt it, turning it into something silly and out of the ordinary.

### **Tyler**

For Tyler, play was represented as both a general concept, such as a person playing at the beach, and as a specific activity in his drawing of a person playing with toys. He did not draw any scenes with multiple characters suggesting that play may not be viewed as social activity, hence the necessity of objects with which to play. His drawings did reflect his social practice in real-life in that he was very quiet and slightly reserved, therefore his motivations for play are not social gain or social interaction. Instead, play is carried out for self-amusement and pleasure. Although rarely articulating his own emotions and perspectives, his figures were represented as engaged and cheerful, suggesting that he perceives play as a positive experience.

### **Mia**

Informed by the 4-SASA, play from Mia's perspective is a tool for role-playing an adult world of human practices of caring for children and tending to the house and family. She rarely refers to unrealistic characters or objects such as dragons at the supermarket, or talking trees. Events, abilities and practices are firmly embedded in the possibilities as defined by reality creating a micro-culture of the adult world. Unlike McKenzie, who drew a football match with the fairy team, Mia's play revolved around her dolls, or as Mia termed them 'babies' which features in one of her prompted drawings. This motivated much of her play. She conveyed concrete ideas of play such as playing with dolls or playing with a ball. Therefore, play could be a simple repetitive activity of bouncing a ball generating an entertaining experience of physical play: 'Boing, boing,

boing...Once you've got it bouncing, it just keeps bouncing!' (Transcription, 17<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2011).

Some imaginative elements were added to the drawings such as suggesting I had a hook for a hand on account of her scribbled representation evoking the idea of a hook rather than a five-digit hand. Additionally, she sang silly songs during the drawing activities and made the characters in her images do things for her own entertainment. Nevertheless, her view of play did not include concepts such as good and evil or seek out fantasy plots or characters. Mia's play mirrors events and experiences from reality-drawing me bouncing a ball in one picture, and a dog and doll in the others. It involves other people or other objects and can be serious, playful, amusing, and enjoyable.

### **Eva**

Eva's perspectives on play as revealed by her drawings revolved around her passion: horses. Evidence of this appeared in the form of culturally conventional symbols such as hearts and kisses which represent fondness or love. Therefore, both drawing and play were representations of meaningful events in daily life such as riding, interacting, and playing with her pony. Interestingly all Eva's play scenes were based in reality, involving real people, animals, and contexts. She never drew imaginative play activities or scenes such as playing with her toy horses.

The predominance of outdoor contexts suggests that a significant part of Eva's play experiences occur outdoors. The contexts tended to offer additional insight into her

ideas of play such as being a positive, fun, and happy experience due to the use of conventional colours such as yellow, orange and multiple colours.

The objects and items played with are not as important as who is played with. Most of her drawings included characters engaging with each other which was explained in her narrative or the positioning of characters interacting (such as Eva riding her horse in Figure 7.12, while her sister watches). Furthermore, drawing did not represent individual figures alone or decontextualized objects. For this reason, play could be considered a social practice. Eva finds it important to include abstract aspects of play such as friendship, love and affiliation between play partners. This is represented using hearts, kisses, and smiling faces suggesting that those who are part of her play are individuals she trusts and with whom she has a close relationship. These are also individuals who live with her and spend a significant amount of time together. The two figures featured in most of her drawings were her sister and her horse.

Overall, play is a positive and active experience shared with others and is something that is embedded in real-life contexts and everyday events.

### **McKenzie**

Based on the 4-step analysis, from McKenzie's point of view, play is primarily a social practice. In other words, what she seeks out in any play experience is social interaction. She enjoys engaging with others rather than the focus of play being the use of objects such as toys, computers and games. The concept of play is predominantly understood

and represented as a group activity or at least one other person to play with. McKenzie's principal concern is related to the individuals involved.

McKenzie's drawings suggested that play can occur anywhere: indoors, outdoors, on a plane, or at a party. Play can also be carried out by both children and adults and should consist of a stimulating activity. Within these social activities, significant elements include competition, conversation, belonging, loyalty, rebellion, forming friendships, and social interaction. McKenzie's most significant play partners are family members, her sister first and foremost, and *best* friends.

McKenzie's play, as revealed by her drawings, is always embedded in reality in as much as it is always set in indoor and outdoor contexts rather than fantasy contexts such as fairyland or on different planets. Nevertheless, there can be imaginative components to play scenes such as playing football against a fairy team, and anthropomorphic animals or objects (for instance, flowers or dogs had human features and traits such as talking, dancing, or wearing clothes). However, when it came to inorganic objects, these were never given human characteristics. In summary, analysis suggests that McKenzie perceives and experiences play as an enjoyable and, most importantly, social activity.

### **Charlotte**

Informed by the 4-SASA, Charlotte considers play as an enjoyable activity which involves another person or another object such as a toy or sporting equipment. Therefore play may be considered a positive experience resulting from a physical act.

Other significant aspects of a play activity are that it is dynamic, creative, energetic, playful, and spontaneous. Play is motivated by favourite activities at nursery such as creative arts and crafts and involves favourite characters such as Peppa Pig and Hannah Montana. Her conceptualisation of play is a fun activity experienced independently or with family and may involve familiar and tangible objects, such as playdough or a ball.

As with many of the girls, her play reflected reality rather than fantasy worlds. Charlotte may consider play as both a social activity and something which is carried out independently to amuse and entertain oneself. The 4-SASA suggests that the experience may be more significant than the actual objects played with as they can be adapted and substituted for other things.

#### **6.4. "Look. *This* is someone playing!" Children's conceptualisation and definitions of play**

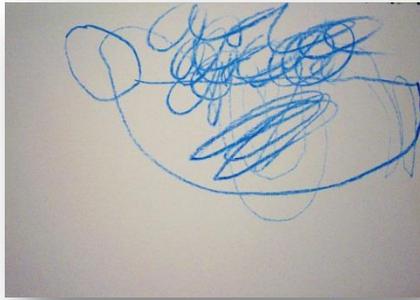
On the whole, the 4-SASA suggests that central aspects of play are: social interaction, amusement and pleasure, achievement, and having control of situations where children make rules, judgments, and decide what happens to characters and the outcome of events. In addition, drawing provided a forum for children to express larger concepts of their play such as good and evil or nurture and responsibility. Children also had specific preoccupations which would arise repeatedly throughout their drawings which were further demonstrated in observations and conversation about play. These included cartoon characters, specific individuals, themes, or activities.

**6.4.1. *Children's unique perspectives on play***

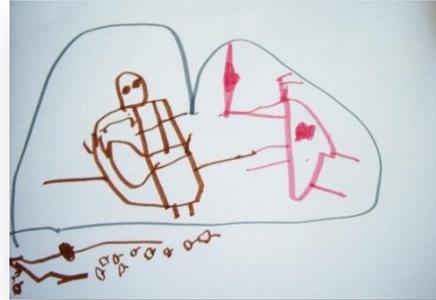
Each child had a unique way of representing play and in some cases, revealed a particular conceptualisation of play which differed from other children. Informed by the 4-SASA (Ch. 5), I examined why children chose particular representations of play to draw rather than others. This facilitated the interpretation of children's perspectives on play as revealed by their drawings.

It is important to highlight the diversity of children's depictions of play because it emphasises both children's idiosyncratic viewpoints, and the breadth of images which can be obtained from drawing an abstract and broad topic. The following list illustrates a range of distinct approaches to representing play:

- Mia's representation of her baby doll (Figure 6.4)
- Fynn's representation of Indiana Jones from his computer game (Figure 6.5)
- Charlie's representation of playing in the garden (Figure 6.6)
- Mia's representation of me playing with a bouncy ball (Figure 6.7)



**Figure 6.4:** Mia's representation of her baby doll, Annabelle.



**Figure 6.5:** Fynn's representation of Indiana Jones from his computer game.



**Figure 6.6:** Charlie's representation of playing in the garden.



**Figure 6.7:** Mia's representation of me playing with a ball.

These examples emphasise how drawings can reveal very different aspects of children's views and experiences of play. For instance, Mia's representations may be considered quite similar as she has chosen to draw something that is played with: a tangible toy or object (Figures 6.4 and 6.7). However, upon further examination using the 4-SASA, we can see that these representations are motivated by very different interests. In Figure 6.7, it is the experience of *playing* with the ball that seems the primary significance of

play, rather than the object itself. Her interpretation of the prompt question was to demonstrate playing as an activity by using the kinaesthetic process of drawing to represent her concept. Hence, a criterial aspect of the image, other than the person, is the scribbling. This has been used to convey the experience of playing with the bouncy ball as a form of physical play. If these swirling lines were absent, then the drawing may look like a person simply standing still. By using the circular lines as a semiotic vehicle, she conveys the physicality, energy, and movement involved in playing with a ball. This is also reflected in her description below.

- Mia: [furiously scribbling] I've drawn a bouncy ball!  
 Somebody's playing with a bouncy ball!  
 Pauline: Someone's playing with a bouncy ball!?  
 Mia: [Nods]  
 Pauline: Ooh.  
 Mia: It's going boing, boing, boing... [Dotting the capped end of the pen all over the paper imitating the bouncing ball]  
 Pauline: Ooh, it's really bouncy!  
 Mia: Boing, boing, boing, boing- it doesn't stop bouncing!  
 Once you've got it bouncing, it just keeps bouncing!

Drawing and conversation with Mia (Transcription, 17<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2011)

By contrast, in Figure 6.4 Mia has filled the page with a large image of her doll and her primary interest is the toy itself. This drawing, as well as observations and conversation with Mia, suggest that the doll is a significant object in her play: 'I most like playing with baby Annabelle' (Transcription, 17<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2012). The doll is the object of her affection and her play. Findings suggest that what she does with the doll is secondary to the significance of the actual toy.

Charlie's drawing (Figure 6.6), demonstrates another unique approach to representing play. In this image, he has chosen to draw himself playing in the garden. He is not

playing anything specific, nor is he playing *with* anything in particular, suggesting that play does not have to entail a specific activity or equipment. In contrast, Fynn attempted to facilitate my understanding of what he plays by articulating the events and adding great detail to his scene (see Figures 6.5 and 7.2.2 for accompanying transcript). He guides us through the characters, obstacles, and setting as he draws.

Unlike Charlie, Fynn is representing a highly specific aspect of his play: his Lego Indiana Jones computer game. The critical aspect of the representation for Fynn is the central character, Indiana Jones. It is his adventure that we are viewing. Rather than depicting an actual computer game by drawing the box as shown in Figure 6.14, he has represented what Indiana Jones experiences in the game. In this way, Fynn has suggested what he himself experiences during play as he takes on the role of this lead character.

As these examples and the many others presented in this chapter show, play was represented in an array of forms, contexts, and manifestations. These included, but were not limited to: indoor scenes, outdoor contexts, *no* contexts, rough-and-tumble play, fantasy play involving monsters, castles, anthropomorphic flowers and animals, structured play, playing at parties or on a plane, playing with people or pets, creative play, and playing with toys and objects. It is worth noting that children tended to represent play as an activity which involved another person or another object such as a toy or sporting equipment. These observations are further supported by other research on children's play such as Plowman and Stevenson (2012:8) where parents were asked to send a text and photo via their mobile phone representing what their children were doing at particular times of the day:

Although this was not a requirement of the exercise, many of the text messages also referred to what the child was playing with, suggesting that the prop (e.g. a toy or a household object used as a toy) was an integral part of defining play.

These findings imply that a criterial aspect of representing play in images is to anchor behaviour with an object. In other words, playing *with* something may be considered a more conventional or more successful way of conveying the concept of playing. Within a social semiotic framework, the interest of the creator is to ensure that the representation can be correctly interpreted outwith the context of its creation. This awareness of context and audience is a necessary part of communication (Kress, 1997). For this reason, an image of a child just 'playing' (non-specific) may be interpreted as a person standing still or something completely different. Take, for example, Charlie's drawing of himself playing in the garden (Figure 6.6). In the absence of an explicit description of the image or physical anchor such as a ball or toy, there is little information regarding what the person is doing.

This discussion reinforces the complexity of representing and interpreting play in children's drawings. Choosing to draw a more concrete representation such as playing with a toy or a ball increases the likelihood of the image being interpreted as play. This relates back to the theoretical framework which the research adopts in that semiosis is only successful if the message being conveyed is correctly interpreted by the receiver. Accordingly, the creator of the message (the child) will choose a representation which suitably conveys the idea of play, as well as a representation specific to the situation, context, culture, and generation with which the receiver is familiar. This may account for the fact that four of the children chose to draw figure(s) playing with a ball. For

instance, Mia drew a person playing with a bouncy ball (Figure 6.7) and Ethan drew a man playing with a football (Figure 6.8). A ball could be considered an effective means of anchoring an elusive concept such as play, into a contextualised and concrete form. Playing with a ball may indeed be one of the most universal forms of play- at any age, across the globe, and any era.

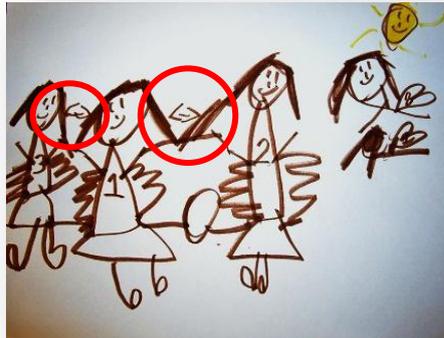


**Figure 6.8:** Ethan's representation of a man playing with a football.

Another example is demonstrated by McKenzie (Figure 6.9). Informed by the 4-step approach to semiotic analysis, 'a person playing' from McKenzie's perspective can be represented by individuals engaged in a structured activity, in this instance, playing football.

Look, *this* is someone playing! ...Look... and that's the football....  
And there's a person on the football. And if someone catches it, he says, "Who got the ball!?"

Conversation and drawing with McKenzie (Transcription, 25<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2010)



**Figure 6.9:** McKenzie's prompted drawing of playing football against the fairy team. The circled arrows highlight the symbols she used to represent the players' feelings towards each other.

McKenzie's drawing suggests that the activity is carried out with other individuals with whom you are familiar and close to. This is reinforced by the inclusion of visual representations to denote one girl liking the other's hair (circled arrows in Figure 6.9).

And they have two teams. Three, a small...look. [Pointing at one of the figures] That's my friend helping me. My sister...my best friend ...black... her hair... [scribbling in the hair] is in my team. She likes my black...She likes my black hair [drawing an arrow between the two of the figures] and she liked it. And I liked it as well! [Drawing more arrows between the other figures] and my sister liked it as well.

Drawing with McKenzie (Transcription, 25<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2010)

Here, McKenzie pulls from prior knowledge of what arrows depict as signs, such as directionality or a connection between objects or concepts, and uses this to represent something abstract: a directionality of an emotion, transferring from one person to another. These signified a bond or fondness between best friends. Interestingly, McKenzie decided to invent these abstract visual elements in order to convey another abstract concept as these additions suggest that McKenzie considered feelings as a

significant part of play. From McKenzie's point of view, there must be some form of affiliation or mutual feelings towards each other or aspects of each other such as physical or character traits to fulfil the requirements of being an ideal play partner. Accordingly, she felt it necessary to represent these emotional bonds albeit through a rather unconventional symbol.

Although McKenzie explicitly states what these arrows represent, step 3 of the 4-SASA allows the researcher to examine why they were used to convey emotion, and why McKenzie considered these signs as criterial aspects of the scene. So although an abstract addition, McKenzie chose to represent these imperceptible inner feelings in a visible form because it was considered a significant part of her play: an activity engaged in with others you like.

Further analysis of McKenzie's play scene reveals that she understands the concept of the game. For example, the necessity of two teams which have been differentiated using different numbers, as well as one team being identified as the 'fairy team', the importance of various players, and the role of a team captain. McKenzie assigns this specific role to her own character.

I'm in charge of my team!

Drawing and conversation with McKenzie (Transcription, 25<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2010)

The self-nominated role of captain suggests that McKenzie understands this coveted position and prefers to lead individuals during play rather than follow. Therefore, in one respect, the drawing conveys loyalty to one's team as the players are united by grouping, size, numbers, and by having the same opposition. Nonetheless, the drawing

also suggests an element of competition and rank by having a team captain who is subtly foregrounded in the picture, slightly larger in size, and positioned closely to the ball.



**Figure 6.10:** McKenzie's representation of me and her father playing.

One final example of children's unique representations of play is epitomised by McKenzie's drawing of her father and me having coffee (Figure 6.10). McKenzie's drawing of me and her father 'playing', suggests that play can be any positive social encounter between two or more people. Based on the 4-SASA, we can see that the faces are salient aspects of the drawing and so our attention is drawn to them. They are distinctly framed using a bright green pen. The emotion felt by the two figures during the social interaction is represented through McKenzie's inclusion of literal representations such as the figures smiling, thus denoting happiness. Further reinforcement of play as a positive social practice is represented by the figures holding hands which can be used to denote a sign of friendship or affiliation. The figures also voice positive affirmations which McKenzie verbalises during narratives, such as, 'And

you say 'Yummy coffee!'. Informed by the 4-SASA, the criterial aspects of her drawing reveal what McKenzie considers as important elements of representing play.

In this instance: friends engaging in an enjoyable social activity.

McKenzie: That's my daddy's hair. And that's you (...) Look. And a big square with my daddy...and you are playing with my daddy. And you say, 'Yummy coffee!'

Pauline: [laughs] Are we having coffee?!

McKenzie: You're having coffee. 'Coffee is yummy' [she says in a different voice], then he says, 'We'll come here later...in 7 minutes...if your mum says yes'. Have you got a mummy that takes you home when you're at someone's house?

Conversation and drawing with McKenzie (Transcription, 25<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2010)

As this example illustrates, from McKenzie's perspective, adults can also partake in play and not only with a child but with another adult. The manner in which she experiences and perceives play is transferred to how she perceives adults to experience an enjoyable social activity. What I mean by this is demonstrated by some of McKenzie's earlier conversation. McKenzie had mentioned going to her friend's house on several occasions, describing what they did and how much fun they had. In this instance, playing is characterised as engaging in activities with another person, possibly within someone's home, experienced as a positive event. This was further reinforced by other drawings which had been analysed using the 4-SASA. For this reason, representing play as adult practice involved using and transferring her positive experiences with a friend, then adding an activity which is part of adult culture such as conversing over coffee, to express a play experience that I could have had with her parents.

#### 6.4.2. *Children's unique perspectives on play: gender*

Although gender was not a central focus throughout my analysis, there were some noticeable aspects of children's drawings and drawing process which warrant further discussion or future study. Due to the small numbers in my sample I cannot generalise my findings in terms of gender differences but with these caveats, I have observations regarding gender differences across the children's drawings which I will briefly summarise here.

Overall, the 4-step analysis revealed that children viewed play as a positive experience. Play was a positive social experience for girls within drawing and actual play, while for boys, although a positive experience for them in reality, the themes occurring in their play also dealt with concepts such as life and death or good and evil. Across all the girls' drawings, there was no reference to death, threat, or having to kill menacing adversaries. In contrast, this was the theme of a number of drawings by two of the boys (such as Figures 6.5 and 7.1). Each character in Figure 7.1 gradually became, as Ethan described, 'infected'. He continued to draw tiny dots on the starfish, the jellyfish, then some of the sharks, wailing 'Aaah...heeeeelp us!!'

Many of the boys' ideas of play were based in the imaginary and fantasy such as Fynn's drawing in Figure 6.11 and accompanying transcript below.

I ask Fynn what he is going to draw in this next picture. He ponders a moment, then, his eyes becoming saucers, exclaims, 'A sea monster!' I reply, 'Wow, that sounds cool', as Fynn begins his drawing. He suddenly corrects himself, 'It's actually a shark...With six teeth!' He busily sketches in the mass of sharp teeth while reassuring me, 'But he eats *fish*, not *people*'.

Fynn drawing and conversation (Reconstructed from field notes, 23<sup>rd</sup> Nov. 2010)

Conclusions from the 4-SASA suggested that boys' play was autobiographical in the sense that drawings revealed the toys, objects, characters, and games they enjoyed playing with. For instance, Figure 6.12 illustrates one of Charlie's many drawings of vehicles which were also visible around the living room and came up in conversation. However, unlike the girls, boys' drawings did not feature any family members or friends. Play as revealed through their drawings did not offer an account of with whom boys actually played, nor did their drawings reflect real-life social events such as going on trips, nursery, playing with friends, family, or pets. On the other hand, girls' play was autobiographical in the sense that it reflected what they did in reality: playing with dolls, with friends outside, going on holiday, playing with family members. In other words, drawings representing play showed real-life situations and experiences.

Despite the small sample, on the whole, differences in drawings across boys and girls were noticeable. However, it is important to state that differences within boys' and



**Figure 6.11:** One of Fynn's numerous monsters. In this instance, a sea monster that is also a shark.



**Figure 6.12:** One of Charlie's many representations of vehicles.

girls' drawings were equally apparent.

### **6.5. Significant figures in children's play**

The 4-SASA revealed that children had a tendency to include representations of significant figures with whom they play. It is important to note here that real-life significant figures were included and represented in girls' drawings such as family members and friends, whereas boys only referred to these in verbal accounts as none of their drawings featured friends or family members. Although many of the boys' figures were characters from games or television programmes, I consider these as significant figures due to their prominence in drawings and conversation relating to the child's play. In particular, when Fynn spoke of Indiana Jones, he spoke fondly of his interaction with him, as if experiencing the adventures together. Indeed, even his self-portrait in Figure 6.13 seems inspired by Indiana Jones. Fynn used the colour brown to draw the entire figure (which was a salient colour of his representation of Indiana Jones), as well as including a stick and a treasure map identifying Indiana Jones as an adventurer and traveller. Drawing on the 4-SASA, Indiana Jones was a salient feature of Fynn's prompted drawing about play (Figure 6.5). He spent considerable time ensuring that the details were correct, one of which was the colour of Indiana Jones. If we refer to an actual picture of the character Fynn is attempting to draw (Figure 6.14), then it is evident that the predominant colour (thus criterial aspect) was brown: his clothing, hat, lasso, even his tanned face. From a social semiotic perspective, Fynn has used colour as a semiotic mode to successfully represent, thus effectively communicate, the identity of this figure. Fynn then proceeded to add mice to his drawing. These were

drawn with great care. The inclusion of mice was an important part of the play scene as it represented a potential nemesis which could be considered fundamental to many of the boys' play. Without someone to play against (in a game), or to challenge (in fantasy warfare), these types of play would be impossible, or simply dull. These types of observations are reinforced by Plowman and Stevenson (2012) who found that in the absence of play props such as toys or equipment, representations or definitions of play always featured a play partner. This suggests that a central aspect of play, or possibly a criterial aspect of representing play visually, is the inclusion of another. For this reason, play could be conceptualised as playing with something: either object or person.



**Figure 6.13:** Fynn's self-portrait.



**Figure 6.14:** Fynn's Indiana Jones computer game.

McKenzie's drawings suggested that she frequently played with her best friend and sister (Figures 6.9, 7.5, and 7.13).

Look at my sister! I'm making my sister now....a round face and brown hair. My sister's always drawing me as well. When my sister is big, I get smaller than her.

Drawing and conversation with McKenzie (Transcription, 25<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2010)

The 4-SASA revealed McKenzie's motivated signs and the underlying interest. From a social semiotic perspective, she includes details considered as criterial aspects of her sister which ensure that the figure is identified as her sister such as her sister being taller than her; rather than someone else such as a friend or generic girl. The attention given to successful representation of her sister in Figure 6.9, as well as the central composition of the figure, shows the significance of this particular person in McKenzie's life. In addition, the inclusion of her friend in the football scene as well as comments made during some free drawing demonstrated that she is a significant figure in McKenzie's play. Six of her drawings featured her sister, one of these being the prompted drawing. This suggests that her sister is a significant part of her play and probably her life in general.



**Figure 6.15:** Eva's significant play partners: her sister and pony.

Informed by the criterial aspects of Eva's drawings, we can see a trend of significant play partners appearing throughout her play scenes (see Figure 6.15 for an overview of these representations). The two primary play partners frequently featuring in Eva's drawings are her sister and her horse. I consider her horse as a play partner rather than a pet or 'object of play' as it features as a character within Eva's play scenes, much like herself or sister, rather than something that is played with in a detached manner. For instance, her puppy was talked about as an object of play rather than a humanised play partner. In other words, it was not given a specific gender and no human features were added such as eyelashes or facial expressions. Throughout her drawings the horse is humanised with the addition of long eyelashes, a hint of an eyebrow, and a smile (see

Figure 6.16). Although horses do, in fact, have long eyelashes, Eva has made them even more prominent, either as a display of gender (from a social semiotic perspective, this would be a criterial aspect for visually representing a female) or used to signify beauty. Moreover, the eyelashes suggest a wide-eyed engagement with the group as a whole.

The representations suggest positive connotations associated with play in that it is being experienced on a sunny day and all the figures have been drawn with happy expressions. In Figure 6.16, Eva has also used colour to further suggest a positive context or experience. She has included bright colours and a large rainbow which can be considered a cultural suggestion of happiness, peace, beauty and hope (Lee & Fraser, 2001). Eva conveys these positive expressions by using cultural conventions of



**Figure 6.16:** Eva playing with her horse and puppy.

drawing an up-turned mouth. Informed by step 3 of the semiotic analysis where the child's motivation and interest are considered, we can see that Eva's representations of play are motivated by her passion for horses. Her interest in this situation is guided by the desire to communicate a particular emotion which is also a criterial aspect of conveying a pleasurable play experience. Hence, she uses the appropriate visual signs to ensure the correct interpretation of her perspectives. Overall, her image conveys a sense of joy, engagement, and animated interaction which may be the essential characteristics of play for Eva.

### **6.6. Summary**

My focus of discussion in this chapter was based upon the 4-SASA outlined in Chapter 5. The specific focus of my research was children's perspectives on play as revealed through drawing. Accordingly, I used the summary of play concluded from step 4 of the analysis to construct children's perspectives in accordance with the criterial aspects of play based upon what the child viewed as significant to include in the drawing.

My approach provided opportunities to explore what children liked to play, and at the same time, discover how a child may conceptualise play. Children's drawings revealed past experiences, what they most often played, who they play with, their definitions of play, and significant components of play episodes.

On the whole, the 4-SASA suggests that central aspects of play are: social interaction, entertainment, achievement, and autonomy. Play is primarily linked to fun, playful

behaviour, enjoyable activities chosen by the child, and is an activity or behaviour engaged in with others.

Findings illustrate children's use of unique visual marks, shape and representations to express their perspectives on play as well as specific aspects of play. Drawings can facilitate researchers in exploring the broad and transient concept of play, and most importantly, explore play from the child's perspective. In sum, this chapter demonstrated how drawings can be used to gain insight into young children's perspectives on play.

## **CHAPTER 7. REFLECTING ON THE BENEFITS AND DRAWBACKS OF USING DRAWING AS A RESEARCH TOOL FOR ACCESSING CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVES: FINDINGS FROM THE STUDY**

### **7.1. Introduction**

This chapter begins by discussing the benefits of using drawing as a research tool for accessing young children's perspectives. I discuss the advantages drawing can offer when working with young children such as engaging and empowering the child, facilitating interaction, and other practical benefits (see Table 7.1). It should be noted that many of these benefits are only relevant if a child-led approach is adopted (see 3.2 - 3.3) in which researchers adapt to children's preferred means of communication and allow children to guide the structure of research activities.

I also emphasise that many of the characteristics of drawing create a research tool which facilitates children's participation and communication. For instance, the fact that it is a familiar activity to all the children in the study means that they can initiate and carry out the activity without adult assistance or direction. The advantages identified relate primarily to my UK sample, and young children who are familiar with drawing and schooling. In contrast, if studies are carried out with older children then we would

need to consider the literature and other empirical evidence suggesting that children age eight years and above may perceive drawing as 'babyish' and not a preferred means of communicating their perspectives (Cox, 2005). Furthermore, children from some cultures are unfamiliar with schooling and associated task-based activities thus may find the task of producing drawings somewhat daunting (Camfield, 2010).

The chapter also highlights several key factors which need to be considered when using drawing as a research tool for gathering children's perspectives. I address social and contextual factors such as the ways in which context can affect what and how children draw, the social framing of the drawing activity, and the child's perceptions of the research process.

These findings are based on its use in this study as a method for gathering children's perspectives on play. Discussion is illustrated using children's drawings and extracts from conversations gathered during main data collection.

## **7.2. The benefits of using drawing as a research tool**

### ***7.2.1. Engaging, empowering, and interacting with children***

Observations demonstrated that children were quick to approach me and engage in close interactions. The novelty of having new things to play with inspired the child's natural curiosity and desire to investigate these new materials.

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I asked Charlie if he wanted to play something. He was shy at first so his dad repeated this asking if he wanted to continue watching the movie or play something with me. Charlie replied, "Play!!" as his eyes lit up. As I moved my large canvas bag out of the way, Charlie noticed all the drawing materials I had brought. He came over and picked them up, "Can we play with these?!"

Conversation with Charlie (Reconstructed from field notes, 22nd Nov. 2010)

This extract reveals the ways in which drawing can prompt social interaction. If we consider Charlie's choice of words, in that he asks if 'we' can play with the materials rather than if he could use them himself, we can see that the activity is one which functions well as a social activity and can be conducive to rich conversation, action and interaction. For this reason, a simple answer or response to the question can evolve into a far richer, animated and multi-dimensional depiction of the same response. The following extract from a conversation with Charlotte demonstrates the glib and limited responses sometimes given by children. These may not be what researchers hope for when attempting to access children's perspectives.

Charlotte's mother chatted a little about the nursery which Charlotte attends. I asked Charlotte what she likes doing at nursery. She replied, "I don't do much there" in a casual tone, completely absorbed in peeling off some stickers she found. Her mother gave me a quizzical look, clearly dumbfounded with her daughter's response.

Conversation with Charlotte (Reconstructed from field notes, 13<sup>th</sup> Dec. 2010)

The absence of an activity which we could do together or one which could be used as a prompt to stimulate conversation was a significant disadvantage. During the second visit, I unwittingly asked a similar, nursery related, question while Charlotte was drawing, to which she immediately responded.

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Pauline: What do you use at nursery?  
Charlotte: Lots of stuff! [looking at me and smiling]  
Pauline: Do you have crayons?  
Charlotte: [Nods]  
Pauline: And pens?  
Charlotte: [Nods] We get them...[pointing at the felt-tip pens]  
Pauline: Pens, yeah?  
Charlotte: Them... [pointing at the coloured pencils] and them [points at the HB pencils and scissors]  
Pauline: Do you get to use scissors, when you're making stuff?  
Charlotte: [Nods]  
Mother: She's more into dressing up I think. They've got a dressing-up corner.  
Charlotte: [Yelling] I THINK WE'LL BE DRESSING-UP TODAY! I wanted to play...[returns to drawing quietly for a few minutes].  
Mother: They get to do lots in nursery...  
Charlotte: Snack and everything! [Returns to drawing quietly]. I like prin[??] stuff.  
Pauline: *Printing* stuff?  
Mother: *Princess* Stuff.  
Pauline: Oh, *Princess* Stuff!  
Mother: The computer as well.  
Charlotte: There's three computers [holds up three fingers]  
Mother: Do you play with it? [computer]  
Charlotte: No.  
Mother: No?  
Charlotte: No-one lets me have a shot...everyone uses the computer and I have to just use the playdough...

Conversation and drawing with Charlotte (Transcription, 14<sup>th</sup> Dec. 2010)

Whether intentional or not, Charlotte had richly articulated her preferred activities at nursery. The change in verbal interaction here suggests that some children prefer, or require, the distraction of an activity when conversing with adults. The inclusion of a drawing activity during this visit removed the necessity of immediate responses and direct interaction with me. Instead, it allowed her mother and me to chat while she confidently and autonomously interjected when she felt she had significant contributions.

Drawing also acted as a mediator in our interaction and conversation. It provided a common topic of conversation and initiated conversation about tangential topics such as recalling experiences, events and sharing information about ourselves.

Charlie spoke of a variety of topics. Some related to what he was drawing such as objects, colours and so forth while others related to his family. He described his older sister, 'She's 8 [years old]' he states. He then continues, 'She's at school just now...but she's gonna be back later'. He then drew several tractors, describing the colours and the size of them. He then described some things he liked, but mostly describing things he disliked.

Conversation and drawing with Charlie (Reconstructed from field notes, 22<sup>nd</sup> Nov. 2010)

As the activity diffused any pressure or focus the child may feel in a similar one-to-one social situation with an adult in the absence of an activity, drawing acted as a distractor for the child.

Drawings can be produced independently or as an activity where individuals can co-create a single picture. An example of this is demonstrated by the picture Ethan and I produced together (Figure 7.1). The picture was prompted by asking Ethan for a suggestion as to what I could draw as he had proposed that we both draw something. As suggested by Ethan, I



**Figure 7.1:** Free drawing co-created by Ethan and me.

began copying Squidward<sup>8</sup> from an assortment of collectors' cards he had featuring various SpongeBob SquarePants<sup>9</sup> characters. Once the head was completed, Ethan continued with the body as this was not shown on the card and he thought it best to draw this himself. Ethan stated that Squidward required a T-shirt. Accordingly, I added a T-shirt along with the colours and details which Ethan suggested.

"That looks good!" he praises, while leaning over the page, now adding polka-dots to Squidward's T-shirt.

Drawing and conversation with Ethan (Field notes, 24<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2010)

Considering Ethan's mother had mentioned he rarely drew at home, I was used as a tool to facilitate the creation of Ethan's ideas that he would add to and adapt. For instance, Ethan drew what he described as 'connection things' between Squidward's head and his detached brain (circled on Figure 7.1 for emphasis). Ethan happily directed my creations as well as assigning his own meaning to the representations.

Drawings can be perceived by children as coveted objects with rich meaning and significance. Children can use them as expressions of affection or amity for family members or even the researcher in the form of gifts. For this reason, drawing can assist researchers in gauging the level of comfort and enjoyment children are experiencing in the presence of the researcher.

As I gathered up my things, Charlie scuttled across the living room and came back holding out a colourful picture he had made at nursery, "You can have this!"

Conversation with Charlie (Reconstructed from field notes, 29<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2010)

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<sup>8</sup> Squidward Tentacles is a character from the Nickelodeon TV show *SpongeBob SquarePants*

<sup>9</sup> *SpongeBob SquarePants* is a children's TV show on Nickelodeon

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McKenzie takes a fresh sheet of paper and states that she is now drawing invitations for her party. She lists some people on the guest list which include her sister and her friend. She then drops the completed invitation into my lap exclaiming, "You're invited to the party!"

Drawing with McKenzie (Reconstructed from field notes, 25th Nov. 2010)

As demonstrated by Charlie and McKenzie's extracts, small gestures can assist the researcher in judging children's enjoyment of interactions and activities together. Charlie's desire to offer me a gift in the form of a picture, and McKenzie deciding that I was worthy of an invitation to the party, can serve as useful behavioural signals in relation to both the child's willingness to participate in the research process and as a sign of acceptance of me, the researcher, into the child's home and daily life.

Another important aspect of the drawing activities was that the children could control and manipulate the situation such as whether I was involved in the drawing activity.

I take out the drawing materials, laying them out on the floor at my feet and some on my lap. Tyler walks over to me to have a look. He doesn't say anything but takes some paper from my lap and goes back to his small table on the opposite side of the living room. I ask him if he wants the pens and pencils too. He nods and returns to take them from me. I ask if he wants me to draw with him or just sit on the sofa. He looks at me, smiles, and replies, "Draw". He turns back toward the table and makes a space on the table where he places a piece of paper ready for me to draw next to him.

Interaction with Tyler (Reconstructed from field notes, 17<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2011)

Upon asking Fynn whether he would like to play something or show me some of his toys, Fynn stated that he wished do some drawing. He sat at his miniature table and laid out a fresh sheet of paper. While he perused the drawing materials on offer, I asked if he would like me to draw with him. He looked up at me, "No, you don't have to. I'll just do one".

Conversation with Fynn (Reconstructed from field notes, 23<sup>rd</sup> Nov. 2010)

The majority of children wanted me to draw with them. This meant that I too had an activity which took focus off the child as 'the observed' or performer. Both the child and I were sharing in a mutual activity. The activity allowed us to become absorbed in the task at hand, rather than each other. This meant that the pressure of answering questions immediately, or at all, was removed.

What these observations suggest is that drawing minimises the researcher's role as a figure of authority. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, the child can regard themselves as the expert in the activity. This is because drawing is an activity most commonly related to, and witnessed in, *children's* daily repertoire; rather than perceived as an activity associated with adult social practice. Therefore, in this specific research scenario, the child is more familiar with the method than the researcher. There is a level of autonomy in that the familiarity of the activity means that children can initiate and participate in the activity without adult guidance or assistance. Secondly, the nature of drawing allows the participant to have control regarding extent of expression and level of interaction with the researcher. In other words, the social rules for drawing seem to be very flexible, without the social pressures of maintaining direct eye-contact with another interlocutor which is the convention associated with interviews or one-to-one conversation. Subsequently, there is an idiosyncrasy to children's drawing practice. For example, it is acceptable, and common for a child to draw in complete silence. Contrastingly, another child's drawings, or possibly different drawings by the same child, are created with rich narration.

Drawing seemed to be regarded as a low risk and familiar activity. Parents do not feel the need to supervise and their absence during the drawing activity allowed children more control, decreasing the obligation to 'perform' or exhibit particular behaviour in the presence of parents.

**7.2.2. *Indiana Jones punching the bad guys: how drawings breathe life into children's (re)constructions of play***

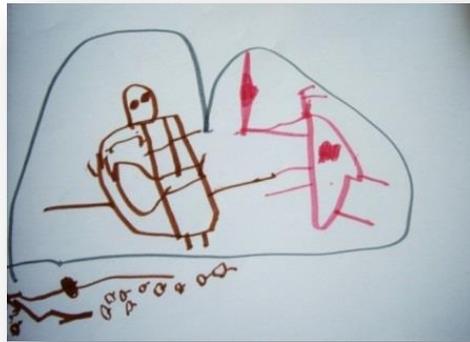
A piece of paper can be inspiring, limitless and offer a flexible approach to self-expression. On occasion, children labelled drawings as 'nothing!' or 'Just a practice one'. These pictures were usually tossed aside or screwed up into a disposable ball of paper. In these instances, drawings could be considered visible accounts of children's thought process.

For example, in the following excerpt, Fynn's descriptions breathe life into the various static objects in his drawing (Figure 7.2).

- Fynn: [starts drawings] this is going to be...this is the tent of the level we have to get. So...em... [goes quiet]  
Pauline: So is that the first level?  
Fynn: Yeah, the first level against Indiana Jones  
Pauline: Ok  
Fynn: Brown Indiana Jones [picks brown pen, draws quietly until finished]. There!  
Pauline: Oh, wow. That's really good.  
Fynn: That's Indiana Jones  
Pauline: Ah, that's Indiana Jones. And what's he doing?  
Fynn: He is...he's got...he's punching the bad guys [begins to draw another figure] this is the hair for the next guy: For Lego man...And the hands...and the mouth...and the nose [labelling each part as he draws them]. And this is a big giant fish. So what Indiana Jones friend is gonna do is...throw it to a fish, then throw it to a

- mouse. The mouse is going to throw it to the mice, after it's at the mice: it's dead.
- Pauline: Is it the end of the level once you get past all those mice?
- Fynn: Yeah. The mice is the bad guys.

Conversation and drawing with Fynn (Transcription, 30<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2010)



**Figure 7.2:** Fynn's drawing representing 'a person playing' or in Fynn's words Indiana Jones, 'punching the bad guys'.

Children took on different roles during the drawing process. They may begin as an outsider or the creator. Then the child becomes one of the characters, acting out the plot or conversations between characters. They may draw themselves and explain what they are doing; then return to the creator talking about the scene as an external observer. Therefore, it allows the researcher to observe how children view different concepts of experiences from different characters' perspectives.

There is also a wealth of information which one can identify through children's drawings without the need for continuous and probing questioning which can distract, intimidate or bore the child. Instead, information can be located within the drawing. This can be a great advantage when working with children who are more reserved during the drawing process. For instance, one can gauge the context of scenes by the inclusion of contextual information such as the suggestion of water, sunshine, furniture, or floor. If we consider the image in Figure 7.3, the information is minimal. However, Charlie's play scene still suggests an outdoor rather than indoor context. The subtle insinuation of grass as a green linear scribble is sufficient to contextualise the play, thus inviting us to interpret the play as occurring in an outdoor setting. Informed by the 4-SASA, we would describe this feature as a 'critical aspect' of Charlie's drawing. This is on account of the green ground line being a salient feature of the picture and the *only* element of Charlie's representation which informs us of the context.



**Figure 7.3:** Charlie's drawing of something relating to play.



**Figure 7.4:** Drawings can provide information about play contexts, partners and objects which may not be accessible through observations. From left to right: Tyler's representation of playing at the beach, McKenzie playing with her best friends, and Fynn's drawing of monsters playing.

Drawing can also be a means of expression which imposes no boundaries on what can be included and represented such as imaginary play, princesses, SpongeBob or monsters. A unique possibility offered by the method is that objects, people, and scenes which are not necessarily present or occurring at the time can be included (as demonstrated by Figure 7.4). In contrast, if the research method was limited to observation, the researcher would only witness the play occurring within that specific time and context, limiting our understanding of the meaning of play, various play partners, and the broad range of play which the child experiences.

Drawing allows aspects of reality and experience to be represented from the child's perspective. This is not necessarily possible via other modes such as conversation and photographs. For example, although photographs can capture play episodes, their success is highly dependent on the skill of the photographer in capturing moments of emotion, action, or interaction. Even when play is captured, we do not know what this

experience was like from the child's point of view. We are also reliant on the child's externalisation of the emotions felt during play such as 'enjoyment': however this may manifest. This discussion can be illustrated by a photograph of Eva with her pony (Figure 7.5a). The photo captures Eva leading her horse back to the stable, assisted by her mother, after a short spell of riding. Eva enjoyed riding as she always expressed great enthusiasm when talking about her pony or other equestrian related activities as well as stating that she had a nice time outside. However, this was not captured in the photo. This could be a result of two factors. Firstly, I refrained from taking photographs while anyone was riding (basic safety precautions when using cameras around horses), and secondly, even if I had taken photos, Eva's expression would not be one of pleasure or delight. The activity was not one of *playful* behaviour as riding a horse requires focus and concentration as well as a calm demeanour. Therefore, the photo does not portray the experience from Eva's point of view. In addition, the environment, a cold, drizzly day in rural Scotland, overshadows the mood and positive experience of Eva with her horse.

In comparison, Eva's drawing in Figure 7.5b (and similarly in Fig. 6.16) shows the same context but from an alternative point of view. Eva's image denotes a sense of joy and interaction. Informed by the 4-SASA, the characters exhibit positive and happy expressions represented by various attributes such as smiles signified by the conventional visual representations of upturned mouths. The outward and upward reaching arms suggest a sense of joy and action. Interaction is also suggested by the characters being positioned toward each other. The scene also suggests Eva's affectionate relationship with her horse. This is primarily denoted by the inclusion of

hearts and kisses. Eva's drawing allows us to see her perspective of the same activity - the enjoyment and vibrancy of experience which we do not necessarily obtain from observing or photographing an event.



**Figure 7.5:** Eva with pony (a) in photo (b) in drawing.

### ***7.2.3. The practical advantages of using drawing***

Is drawing special, or could any activity or method be substituted to elicit the same level of discourse and provide the same opportunities for communication and interaction? The key advantage of using drawing as a research tool is that drawing requires no instructions. This is particularly noteworthy when making comparisons to other activities such as games or methods which may be unfamiliar to children thus necessitating direction or prompts. A game may also require both parties to participate as well as a familiarity with the rules of game. In contrast, all children in my study simply began drawing without any prompt or suggestions from me regarding the materials, purpose or outcomes of the activity.

All children, across all stages of my research responded positively to drawing. For typically developing children, it is seen as a normal extension of play rather than a foreign activity or task. For this reason, parents and children were keen to participate in the research as a whole. A unique trait of drawing is that children did not view it as an activity associated with a particular gender. In contrast, children frequently articulated their opinions regarding various games, characters, toys and TV programmes which were quickly labelled by children as 'only for boys' or 'girls stuff'.

Drawing is an artistic and creative means of conveying ideas, thoughts and representations of the world and mind. So, why not use some other expressive medium such as painting or clay? Although both can be viewed as expressive and familiar, their efficacy as a research tool raises different issues which need to be considered over and above how the methods function as a tool for expression. There are practical challenges

inherent with particular creative methods such as paint and dough as the potential for mess means an appropriate area in the home is required. Drawings on the other hand are mess free, a valuable positive attribute with parents when research is to be carried out in the family home. Certain creative methods may have their own restrictions such as paint being a more difficult material in which to form written text or fine details.

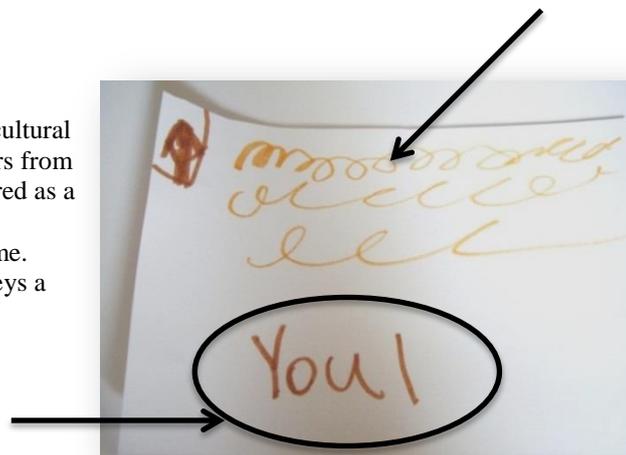
Drawing allows children to be creative and its malleable nature can offer children a limitless tool for representation: from representing scenes as a detached observer, to using the same tool to represent a party invitation, a lollipop, or competition rosettes (Figure 7.6). Drawing also gives children the opportunity to include written text, label figures or include their own names as an expression of identity and ownership. Many children sang, conversed, danced, role played, or supplemented drawings with sound effects during the drawing process. They would also eat, drink, or sporadically leave the room, bringing back a toy or more drawing materials, showing me things, or reappearing with the aim of playing something different. Alternatively, they returned to the same drawing, as if they had never left.



**Figure 7.6:** [Left to right] Tyler's map, McKenzie's purse, and Eva's rosette.

Structured scribbles used to signify the general concept of writing. Despite being scribbles, the conventional rules of the English language are still being followed such as marks made from left to write in a linear pattern to suggest sentences.

Use of appropriate cultural convention i.e. letters from the alphabet structured as a word, as a means of representing her name. Here, the sign conveys a specific meaning.



**Figure 7.7:** McKenzie's invitation to the party.

As a multimodal semiotic vehicle, drawings were a fusion of various visual representations, symbols, marks, and modes of representation. Text and numbers were not necessarily represented according to conventional rules and grammar. If they are to function as a word, with specific meaning they would need to follow rules of written language to be correctly interpreted by others. However, writing can be implied through a suggestion of written text which can be deemed sufficient for the purposes of the representation. For instance, through symbolic representations of text, McKenzie uses a metaphor in the form of a structured pattern of horizontal scribbles, to offer a general representation of written text (Figure 7.7). This is also known as emergent writing and often appears when children are learning to write. Based on the 4-SASA,

McKenzie's drawing shows a clear differentiation between the written word as a cultural tool for communication, and its use as a symbol, included as a critical aspect of the representation for its interpretation as an invitation. In this instance, the representation is used to convey the concept of writing, rather than the messages conveyed by the written word. This in turn is used to convey the idea of an invitation. In contrast, where she uses the written word to convey something specific with a particular meaning, in this case, her name, she adheres to the cultural rules and structures of written language such as letters from the English alphabet. The desire to convey specific meaning demands the use of culturally accepted rules and structure of language to ensure that the message is correctly interpreted.

The points discussed in this section are summarised in Table 7.1.

<b>BENEFITS OF DRAWING AS A RESEARCH TOOL</b>			
<b>Characteristics of drawing</b>	<b>Engaging participant</b>	<b>Practical advantages</b>	<b>Empowering participant</b>
Creative	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Social	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Flexible and open-ended	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Adaptable: can be carried out in many contexts and within various time limitations	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Use of activity adjunct to other tasks	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Familiar: normal extension of play hence non-threatening and no instructions necessary	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Cheap materials; easy to purchase		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Meaningful: Personal, creating tangible product, self-motivated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Considered part of children’s daily repertoire rather than adult’s social practice	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Multimodal: can include written text (inclusion of name), use of different mediums and modes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Multiple functions: drawing as play, communication, distraction, prop, mediator	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Drawing viewed as a gender neutral activity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Drawings can be revisited and edited		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Uncomplicated: Adult supervision not required		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Data easy to record, transport and store		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Drawing process allows reflection and time to think about ideas			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Adult and child joint participation can minimise adult role as authority figure			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Ownership of data: generating data and meanings			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

**Table 7.1:** An overview of the benefits of using drawing as a research tool

### **7.3. Key factors to be considered when using drawing as a research tool**

As discussed in previous sections, the method of drawing has great potential for facilitating communication and interaction with young children, and as a result, enabling the researcher to access the child's perspectives. However, as with any method, there are limitations and caveats which need to be addressed. The following section considers the challenges of using drawing as a research tool by examining a number of key factors which can influence the production of drawings and their subsequent interpretation.

The identified factors are discussed within two overarching themes. These are: social and contextual issues (Table 7.3) and using children's drawings as data (Table 7.4). All the issues addressed within these two themes cover important methodological and analytical considerations such as the ways in which context can affect children's drawings, the social framing of the drawing task, the child's perceptions of various aspects of the research process, and issues regarding the use of visual data as the basis for constructing children's perspectives.

#### ***7.3.1. The social framing and function of drawings***

Early observations demonstrated the diversity of drawings produced across all the children and by the same individual child. With consideration to such variation in detail, use of colour, focus, and representations throughout children's images, there seemed to be far more involved in the creation of a drawing than simply skill level correlating to age or stage of development among preschool children (Cox, 1992;

Kellogg, 1979). Accordingly, it seemed necessary to explore the factors influencing *what* and *how* children draw.

Drawings have multiple and diverse functions which serve different purposes within children's social practices. These include:

- ✓ Drawing as task or work
- ✓ Drawing as play
- ✓ Drawing as creative expression
- ✓ Drawing as tangible or aesthetic object (given, received, used as prop)
- ✓ Drawing as communication

The multiple functions of drawing can be of benefit in various aspects of the research process. Nonetheless, it is equally important to explore how these distinct functions can lead to constraints on both the *type* of data gathered, and the richness of this data.

It is acknowledged that children are aware of the various functions drawings have and how these can be used and adapted within various contexts based on what the situation calls for. Accordingly, some children can develop a differentiated repertoire with various representations available for different functions and the vigour, level of detail and investment



**Figure 7.8:** Charlotte's snowman greetings card.

in creating the picture can be highly dependent on the purpose of drawing (Lindstrom, 2000). For instance, both McKenzie and Charlotte clearly stated the purpose of particular drawings. McKenzie created invitations for an alien party (Figure 7.7), emulating social conventions of formally inviting guests through an informative written gesture. In this scenario, drawing had a function beyond the aesthetic and the decorative. Here, the purpose was to communicate details of an event and to request an individual's attendance. When we compare this image to McKenzie's other work (such as Figures 6.10 or 7.13) it becomes evident that different functions and purposes of drawings can result in distinctly different images.

In contrast, Charlotte's richly creative Christmas card (Figure 7.8) was created especially for family members following cultural convention of seasonal practices, and fulfilling the objective of visual appeal. Considering that the card was created for others to see, one can appreciate the additional detail included and quality of construction to ensure aesthetic appeal. The gleefully glittered image may be both influenced by its festive purpose so there is an obligation to be suitably special, and its function as an aesthetic object to serve as a gift or offering thus it must be considered appealing to others. By comparison, Charlotte's prompted drawings (Figures 7.10 and 7.11) do not demonstrate the same aesthetic function. Instead, they denote a more decontextualized representation involving abstract imagery, not necessarily created to be interpreted or recognised outwith the context of their production.

### ***7.3.2. The contextual sensitivity of children's drawing practice***

Observations suggest that the various functions of drawings are influenced by the context in which they are created.

Context can refer to (i) the physical context such as whether drawing is carried out in the child's home, school, kitchen, hospital, the presence of peers, teachers, or parents; and (ii) micro-contexts such as the social framing of drawing, prompted or free drawing. Is it a relaxed context, or a highly structured and formal social context? By acknowledging the possibility of various contextual issues, we can begin to examine how they may impact research findings in terms of the following: firstly, how the research context can affect the extent and capacity of a child's self-expression or disclosure (Smith *et al.*, 2005), and secondly, how context may shape what and how things are represented in children's drawings.

The presence of researchers, parents, siblings or teachers within these contexts can influence how children perceive their own representations and what children choose to include in their drawings. For example, children may alter their representations to fit cultural convention, conforming to peers, or producing aesthetically pleasing artwork for teachers in exchange for praise. If we consider one of Charlotte's prompted drawings in Figure 7.10, we can see how she has exploited the contextual framing of the drawing in that the interpreter was present. This allowed her to convey a significant proportion of the message through the drawing process. In comparison, her family portrait in Figure 6.2 is relatively discernible outwith the context of its production. For instance, we can see they are human figures in a group, possibly friends or family.



**Figure 7.9:** Eva drawing at the kitchen table during the first visit (left), then choosing to draw in the living room on the second visit (right).

The home can be viewed as an obvious and natural setting for children to draw. Children had habitual areas within the home where they would draw. Therefore, adopting the child's natural repertoire and drawing practice can be made simple by observation and allowing children to guide the contexts of our drawing activities. For example, in Eva's case (Figure 7.9), during the first visit she drew sitting next to me at the kitchen table. In contrast, at the onset of the second visit, Eva stated that she was going to draw in the living room where she sat at a small table by herself.

Nevertheless, researchers should not assume that all contexts are perceived by children as comfortable or familiar places to draw or that drawing is part of the child's routine activities in the context of the home. If we consider the case of Ethan, he showed no focus or interest in the drawing activity. Instead, he jumped from one toy to the next, scribbled on his etch-a-sketch, and then scribbled on some paper. A little later in the visit, however, we talked about nursery and he began describing how he had been drawing with his friend that day:

Ethan: I was doing squares.  
Pauline: Ah, squares... can you do squares?  
Ethan: I was making my list and...like this...and doing squares  
[draws a square in the air with his finger]  
Pauline: Did you just do squares or did you draw other things?  
Ethan: Squares.  
Pauline: Just squares  
Ethan: Uhummm...

Conversation and drawing with Ethan (Transcription, 20<sup>th</sup> Dec. 2010)

Ethan may perceive drawing as a more structured activity carried out at nursery. In the home context, Ethan possibly prefers to play or converse and have drawing remain as an adult-directed activity or carried out in a more formal context. What can be concluded is that the research context can affect not only how a child may draw, but also *if* they draw. In this case, drawing was not necessarily the best communicative tool to access his perspectives.

### ***7.3.3. How does the child construe the research process?***

The observations discussed in the following sections suggested that children were forming their own perceptions of the research process by evaluating, interpreting and questioning aspects of the situation in an effort to understand the curious social encounter called 'research'. I began to question how these perceptions could affect what and how children were drawing and how, in turn, these factors impact our interpretations of the data.

What became increasingly apparent during the process of analysis was the idiosyncrasy of children's prompted drawings. Every child had a distinctive and innovative approach to representing play, whether this was the concept as a whole, or a specific aspect of play. In order to explore how children's perceptions affected the research process, it was necessary to examine the diverse and unique ways in which children approached the prompted drawing activity. This would allow me to investigate how children's perceptions of the specific task may have influenced their drawings and what was subsequently being interpreted as children's perspectives on play as revealed by their drawings.

Before engaging in further discussion of children's interpretations of the prompted drawing activity, I will briefly reiterate the questions used and rationale for these prompts. The two prompt questions (PQ) used were: (1) Will you draw anything you can think of when you hear the word 'play'? And (2) Will you draw a person playing? The first question was based on a question used in a study exploring children's perceptions of recess and served as a means of exploring the task of drawing abstract concepts (Angelides & Michaelidou, 2009). However, observations during pilot studies suggested that the first question format was, on occasion, prompting a word association thought process. This was potentially restricting the data in terms of children's perspectives on play. As a result, the second prompt was chosen to offer a more concrete question as opposed to the abstract nature of the first.

Both children's drawings and comments illustrated and challenged the efficacy of the PQ in facilitating the production of (i) rich data, and (ii) relevant data that could answer

the research aims and objectives. In comparison to children's narratives and my own observations of their play experiences, some children's drawings appeared very limited in what they actually communicated or represented in terms of their perspectives on play.

Some children did voice their concerns regarding the possibility of misinterpretation before attempting to respond with a visual representation.

Mia pauses and thinks of what to draw next, I offer a suggestion in the form of the first prompt question "Will you draw a person playing?" Mia looks at me quizzically, smiling as if I had said something amusing "What?!" She exclaims, seemingly confused by my request, adding "What are you actually meaning?"

Prompted drawing with Mia (Transcription, 17<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2011)

If we consider the children's interpretations of the PQ, Mia's question implies that she was unsure of what I wanted her to draw. Some literature does suggest that young children may find it difficult to distinguish between what is said and what is meant. As a result, hypothetical, vague or ambiguous questioning or instruction become problematic (Scott, 2008) (see 8.3.1 for further discussion).

In contrast, McKenzie did not question her own interpretation of the PQ. As exemplified in her response, a child may simply draw the first thing they think of irrespective of whether it actually relates to the concept of play.

Pauline: Will you draw a picture of anything you can think of when you hear the word 'Play'?"

McKenzie: A PLANE! [Spinning her hand around while making a 'whooshing' sound]. It's like an aeroplane!

Conversation with McKenzie (Transcription, 25<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2010)

In this scenario, McKenzie thought of the word, 'Plane'. Her response to the PQ may have been the result of word association where the child suggested a word relating to the auditory likeness to 'play' rather than something which related to the meaning represented by the word.

Figure 7.10 illustrates Charlotte's conceptualisation of play, in this instance, as an experience. In response to my prompt question, she began scribbling until the page was filled with a swirl of looping arcs and wavy lines. She then exclaimed, 'Done! That's me, playing with playdough!' thus verbalising her visual meaning. Here, Charlotte uses the activity of drawing to show me what play looks like or even feels like. Her smiling and energetic scribbling denoted the physicality of playful behaviour, and suggested that play was fun and spontaneous. These visible consequences of the child's meaning-making as both marks on paper and accompanying behaviour, are the externalisations



**Figure 7.10:** Charlotte's prompted drawing representing play as the experience of playing with playdough.



**Figure 7.11:** Charlotte's prompted drawing representing play as an object: a Peppa Pig ball.

of the child's attempts to communicate their perspectives. Charlotte's approach to communicating the act of playing with playdough was to capture the element of *playing* rather than what is being played *with*: the playdough itself. In Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) terms of analysis, the drawing is motivated by the child's interest. In Charlotte's case, it is not the playdough itself that is the primary significance of play, but rather a tool which facilitates an enjoyable play experience through uninhibited playful, creative and physical behaviour. Hence, the criterial aspect of the image is the scribbling, which has been used to convey the experience of playing. Playdough would most likely result as an unidentifiable 'blob' on the page if realistically represented: static and uninteresting. From Charlotte's perspective this would be the opposite of what is considered as quintessentially play. What can be concluded from Charlotte's approach to the prompted drawing is that the ambiguity and abstraction of a representation does not signify the lack of meaning conveyed. These observations suggest that we should approach the interpretation of visual images with sensitivity and awareness of children's motivations to ensure we capture children's attempts to visually represent play as behaviour or experience rather than a simpler or more palpable illustration of play.

In contrast to Charlotte's playdough picture, Figure 7.11 presents a very different approach to representing play. Here, Charlotte decides to draw an object with which she likes to play: her Peppa Pig ball. To complete this representation, Charlotte retrieved the ball from the kitchen and then methodically copied the object as it lay beside her.

Through my exploration of children's responses, I acknowledged that alternative interpretations of the PQ are possible. Despite the drawback in terms of foreseeing how a child may interpret a question and inevitably affecting their representations of play, an open-ended PQ does offer a unique opportunity to gather children's views from a variety of angles and as a result, constructs a richer and more general overview of how they conceptualise various aspects and forms of play.

***7.3.4. Getting it 'right': how a perceived correct response may be more important than expressing your opinion***

It has been argued that children are perfectly competent in ascribing whatever meaning is necessary just to satisfy an adult's request and complete a set task (Coates, 2002). Furthermore, children can be aware of their own limitations, so they know what they can draw, and what they can draw well. This may be particularly pertinent within the research context where they may feel they and their picture are being judged or assessed. The child also learns to conform to styles that are most prevalent, recognisable and valued in their own culture (Cox, 2005a). During the drawing activities, I noticed that children's thinking was often verbalised in an effort to confirm whether their ideas for responses were correct. The following extract suggests that in Fynn's opinion, he was unable to fulfil the request of my PQ.

Pauline: Can you draw a person playing?  
Fynn: No...I can just draw...eh... [long pause] myself.

Conversation with Fynn (Transcription, 30<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2010)

From my point of view, children choosing to draw themselves playing is a perfect response to my PQ. However, from Fynn's perspective, '*a person playing*' was possibly interpreted as a request to draw someone other than himself playing. An alternative interpretation is that he *could* draw a person, but not doing the activity which I had suggested. This implies that children expect questions from adults to have a right and wrong answer. For that reason, the child's objective is to produce the correct response, consequently completing the set task and fulfilling adult expectations.

In the following extract, Charlotte's representation originates from an initial assessment of what she deems as something not only relating to play but, more importantly, something which she can draw.

Prior to drawing, Charlotte suggests, "Well...I can draw a football..." then places the actual object, retrieved from the kitchen, by her side, which she then methodically copies.

Conversation and drawing with Charlotte (Transcription, 13<sup>th</sup> Dec. 2010)

One could question whether, from the child's point of view, it is more important to draw something well or to draw something directly relating to the topic requested? With regard to research findings, this is an important question to explore. The notion of children simply drawing what they draw well suggests that what we interpret as the child's perspectives warrants further scrutiny.

To develop these ideas, Charlotte, Ethan and Eva's comments elucidate the pressure felt by children when having to provide a correct response, as well as producing a drawing of a certain standard for adult viewing:

Chapter 7. Reflecting on the Benefits and Drawbacks of Using Drawing as a Research Tool for  
Accessing Children's Perspectives: Findings from the Study

Charlotte grimaces at the sheet of paper, clearly upset, "Noooo! That's an awful one!" She declares. Charlotte then tosses the drawing toward the sleeping cat lying next to her, "Here. You can have that one".

Drawing and conversation with Charlotte (Transcription, 13<sup>th</sup> Dec. 2010)

Eva suddenly exclaims, "OH NO! That bow doesn't look like that one!" Pointing at the bow she had just drawn on the dog and comparing it to the one on the unicorn. She looks at me, face full of concern and asks "Do these pens rub out?!"

Conversation and drawing with Eva (Transcription, 16<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2011)

"Is that good?"

Drawing with Ethan (Field notes, 24<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2010)

In these cases, we could interpret the children's responses and drawing practice as potentially reflecting children's awareness of the 'communicational environment' (Kress, 1997). In a research context, it is not sufficient to have drawings represent meanings, but these meanings must be recognisable to the external observer if the objective is to use drawing as a communicative tool. Thus, representations must conform to or attempt to replicate conventional 'visual language'. For example, while drawing, Charlotte exclaims, 'How am I gonna do buttons? ...How am I gonna do buttons!!?' (Transcription, 13<sup>th</sup> Dec. 2010) suggesting an awareness that buttons, as a representation, must appear in a particular form otherwise there is little point in drawing them if they were unrecognisable.

### ***7.3.5. Prompting children to draw***

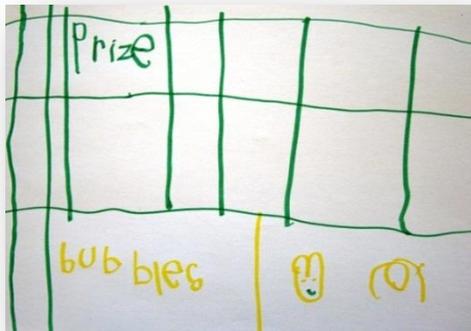
Initial observations suggested that free drawing (FD) and prompted drawing (PD) were perceived as two distinct activities. Figures 7.12 and 7.13 demonstrate some of the rich and detailed free drawings where children invested time and energy in producing their representations. The narrative accompanying the drawing process was also colourful, describing the story, the characters, as they created an image far beyond the static picture on the page. In free drawings, children may draw a broader range of experiences and concepts, knowing that they can dispose of these, and they are not created to fulfil a particular purpose. For this reason, children included imaginary play, abstract concepts of relationships and emotions, and past experiences such as holidays and different seasons.



**Figure 7.12:** Eva's free drawing representing an outdoor play scene with her sister and pony.



**Figure 7.13:** McKenzie's free drawing of playing in the garden with her sister and puppy.



**Figure 7.14:** Eva's prompted drawing representing an outdoor play scene with her pony.



**Figure 7.15:** McKenzie's prompted drawing of an aeroplane.

In comparison, the decontextualized representations produced during the prompted drawing activity (Figures 7.14 and 7.15) suggest that drawings took on a rather different function: to produce a quick visual answer in response to my question. Observations such as these indicated the need for further inquiry into how these distinct functions of drawing can lead to both constraints on the richness of data obtained, as well as affecting the *type* of data gathered.

These issues led me to question whether there was a fundamental difference in outcome between drawing spontaneously and drawing when asked to do so by an adult. Table 7.2 compares some of the more prominent features of the drawing process observed during free drawing and the more typical characteristics of prompted drawing. This was more apparent in particular children such as the two children's drawings in Figures 7.12 - 7.15. However, there were some children who demonstrated similar drawing processes during free and prompted drawing activities. Nonetheless, there were some other behaviours such as asking what I meant by the prompt question which suggested that the child was aware of having to produce a specific outcome thus changing the function of the drawing process. For instance, upon asking Ethan if he could draw a person playing, he began drawing a man, describing that, 'he's playing with a football' (Transcription, 20<sup>th</sup> Dec. 2010). It was once he completed his picture that his drawing practice took a unique turn. He stood up and walked across the room toward the digital video camera and held up his drawing in front of the lens.

By comparing the two activities, what becomes apparent is the impact that prompting drawings may have on the efficacy of the method as a communicative tool. On the one hand, free drawings could be considered different data in that they produce different responses. Alternatively, free drawings may be providing a richer, more comprehensive documentation of the same response. In other words, one is still gathering the same data but simply in the form of a more vibrant and informative presentation.

Observations suggest that prompted drawing may in fact change the function and communicative value of drawing and as a result we may be losing something from the manner in which we apply certain methods.

THE IMPLICATION OF PROMPTING CHILDREN TO DRAW	
CHILDREN’S DRAWING PROCESS	
Free drawing	Prompted drawings
Contextual information/backgrounds	‘Decontextualisation’ of objects
Aesthetically pleasing	Visual appeal not primary objective
Varied content and eclectic representations	Simplified representations: selecting only critical aspects of object or scene
Less pressure and expectations	Additional pressures and expectations of fulfilling task
More balanced relationship between researcher and child due to minimised awareness of researcher in adult role	Power shift: heightened awareness of researcher as figure of authority

**Table 7.2:** A comparison of free and prompted drawing as suggested by some of the characteristics observed in children’s drawing process and outcomes.

#### 7.4. Summary

In this chapter I discussed the benefits of drawing as a research tool for accessing young children’s perspectives such as being engaging, facilitating interaction and having practical advantages. I also considered what drawing could offer over and above other methods as a research tool for exploring play.

Findings support previous literature in demonstrating the potential of drawing as an engaging and non-threatening method used with young children. Most children enjoy, or are at least familiar with, drawing. On the whole, this familiar and simple activity offered a fun, but more importantly, relaxed method of interaction. Nevertheless, the success or limitations of drawing must be examined within the specific purpose of the method for this study: gathering children's perspectives on play. A number of issues were identified in my research which may significantly influence the interpretation of data and research outcomes. Findings suggest that the communicative potential of drawing is very much a situated affair. Children produce certain types of drawings within particular contexts and social situations as a result of their own perceptions of these contexts and perceived demands of the social situation. The variety of responses obtained throughout the drawing activities may also be due to the prompt questions, as understood within that context, the subject of drawings, as well as attempting to interpret the researcher's expectations in order to produce the correct visual response. Ultimately, the function drawing plays within the research process does not solely lie in the hands of the researcher, but rather is determined by the discussed external factors as well as the framing of the activity and the child's perception of the research task.

<b>DRAWING AS A RESEARCH TOOL: FACTORS TO CONSIDER</b>	
<b><i>SOCIAL AND CONTEXTUAL ISSUES</i></b>	
<b>Aspects of the physical context of drawing</b>	<b>Micro-context of drawing: Prompted drawing activity</b>
<p>Context can affect how and <i>if</i> children will draw</p> <p>Drawing may not be part of children’s routine activities in the context of the home</p> <p>Relaxed vs. formal or structured context</p> <p>Presence of researcher, parents, siblings or teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Copying others or adopting conventional representational styles and images</li> <li>– Pleasing figures of authority</li> </ul>	<p>Framing of task (e.g. drawing elicited using prompt question)</p> <p>Child’s perception of researcher’s agenda (power shifts)</p> <p>Pressures of providing a correct response due to adult request</p> <p>Limiting self-expression &amp; communication due to risk of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Selecting only critical aspects of representation therefore less creativity or decontextualisation of objects</li> <li>– Creating structured task rather than freedom of expression</li> </ul>

**Table 7.3:** Summary of key factors to consider when using drawing as a research tool: Social and contextual issues.

<b>DRAWING AS A RESEARCH TOOL: FACTORS TO CONSIDER</b>		
<b><i>USING DRAWINGS AS DATA</i></b>		
<b>Analysis &amp; interpretation</b>	<b>Ethical issues</b>	<b>Subject/topic of drawings</b>
<p>Unit of analysis: final product vs. process of production</p> <p>Absence of accompanying narrative can problematize interpretation</p> <p>Multiple functions and purposes of drawing: influenced by child’s agenda and research context</p> <p>Analysis should mirror underpinning research principles i.e. privileging child’s accounts rather than adult interpretations</p> <p>Lack of studies using systematic and replicable approaches to analysis</p>	<p>Ethical issues unique to using visual methods of data collection</p> <p>Identifiable individuals or information</p> <p>Ownership &amp; anonymity: decisions of including or removing children’s names from drawings</p> <p>Meaning &amp; significance of drawings as personal artefacts: risk of distress or dissatisfaction with what is being produced and retained as data</p>	<p>Difficulty of drawing abstract concepts</p> <p>Complex task of representing a topic/concept which is has multiple &amp; broad definitions</p> <p>Risk of obtaining what child perceives as the easiest representation of subject rather than most significant</p> <p>Transduction: issues concerning the task or skill of representing something from one semiotic mode into another</p>

**Table 7.4:** Summary of key factors to consider when using drawing as a research tool: Using drawings as data.

## CHAPTER 8. DISCUSSION

### 8.1. Introduction

This final chapter discusses the main outcomes of my research as evidenced by Chapters 5, 6, and 7. I demonstrate the originality of research findings, reflect on possible limitations of the study, and provide suggestions for areas of further investigation. This chapter closes with some final conclusions which can be drawn from the research. I re-examine the central issues identified and consider the wider implications for research practice when using children's drawings as a research tool. The discussion addresses the following issues:

- The contextual sensitivity and social framing of children's drawing practice
- The complex task of representing abstract topics
- The wider implications of *prompting* children to draw

From these key issues, I draw attention to one of the principal research findings which I would like to highlight as integral to achieving the expressive and communicative potential of drawing: the fundamental issues of researchers using prompted drawings as the basis for constructing children's perspectives.

I conclude the chapter with a brief discussion concerning gender differences in children's drawing content and practice. I consider how these may have important implications for the ways in which we interpret drawings as representations of children's perspectives on play.

## **8.2. The complexity of using drawings to access children's perspectives**

As indicated at the onset of my thesis, my primary concern is not to challenge the efficacy of drawing as a research tool, but rather to re-examine this long established visual means of expression, and consider it specifically as a research tool for gathering young children's perspectives. I also do not claim that it is the most appropriate method for investigating children's perspectives on play. Not only do different children prefer to communicate in different ways, but findings also imply that certain forms or aspects of play can be conveyed as a visual image while others cannot. As Dennis (1966:8) states, 'No tool can perform all functions...The problem is to learn what they do reveal'.

Here, it is important to reiterate the underlying theoretical stance adopted in order to contextualise my research findings and frame my view of children's drawings. My approach is to value children's drawings as a semiotic vehicle, where messages are created within the drawing process through signification. For this reason, I valued the representations as expressing the child's unique interpretation of play, in whatever form this may be: abstract image, general concept, experience, or specific activity. Indeed, attempting to uncover children's meanings may sound easier than it is in actual practice. To illustrate this I return to an example which I use in section 3.7.1. If a child draws a bird, is the child representing a generic bird, a computer game, or a pterodactyl? Therefore, as researchers working with children and their communicative practices, we must look beyond the first level of metaphor in my earlier example and consider the wider associations represented by: firstly, the bird-like image, and secondly the more specific signification of, for instance, a pterodactyl. For one child, this creature may denote a frightening experience watching a movie; for another, the creature represents a

fun experience playing ‘dinosaurs’. In my study, this was achieved by using a social semiotic framework which acknowledges the sign as always embedded in the social and uses the child’s motivations and interest to understand the meanings they convey through drawing.

Previous studies offer a variety of theories as to what may influence the creation of children’s drawings. Some suggest that children’s drawings are produced by using aspects of visual knowledge based on images they are exposed to in the media, family environment and culture in which they live (Cox, 2005b; Luquet, 1927). For instance, from a developmental perspective, figures in profile tend not to appear in western countries until children are around nine years old. As a result, the human figures featured in young children’s drawings are almost always drawn forward facing (Cox, 1992). Other studies propose that children will simply repeat objects that exist within their drawing repertoire rather than attempting the innovative and original in every drawing produced (Dennis, 1966). This iterative drawing practice enables children to become subject specialists. Therefore, drawings can exhibit the same representations over and over based on the child’s confidence or familiarity with these particular images (such as Tyler’s recurrent ‘little man’ in Figure 8.1). My findings also



**Figure 8.1:** Tyler’s ‘little man’ (as defined by Tyler) frequently featured in his drawings.

reinforced previous research suggesting that boys and girls tend to draw human figures of the same gender as themselves (Cox, 2005).

If we are to interpret children's drawings meaningfully and successfully, then we must consider the implications of these theories as part of that process. For instance, if we request a child to draw a particular person such as a scientist or teacher (see 2.7 for example studies), we must take account of children's routine drawing practice. If I use Tyler's drawings as an example (Figure 8.1), then we can begin to acknowledge the possibility of alternative interpretations. If Tyler had been requested to draw his favourite teacher, then it is likely that it would conform to his previous human figure drawings in which the figures tend to face forward, are the same gender, have large eyes and extended arms as this is a fairly typical representation. For this reason, researchers should be wary of interpreting young children's drawings based on representational features such as figures facing a particular direction, or being of a particular size or gender without further information about the child's typical drawing repertoire, signification, and theories of children's drawing practice.

### **8.3. Children's perceptions of the research task**

Framing is the basis from which we can begin to interpret and analyse the meanings conveyed: '...there is no meaning without framing' (Kress, 2010:10). As a result, interpretation is framed by social context and so is embedded in social norms, behaviour, convention and assumptions, shaped by the audiences, purpose, the child's understanding and perception of the communicative situation.

For this reason, studies emphasise the importance of not only making research task prompts as explicit as possible, but also ensuring these activities are meaningful for the

child (Davis & Bentley, 1984). Indeed, for any participant, a decontextualized task is one which is more difficult to comprehend or engage with, if one cannot relate it to daily repertoire or practice (Donaldson, 1978). If we embed a research task within something with which the child is familiar, then this creates a more meaningful activity which the child is more likely to understand.

I explore how children's perceptions and interpretations of the research task, the prompt question, as well as the researcher, may influence and alter what is drawn.

### ***8.3.1. Asking the right question***

Question 1 below had been used in my earlier pilot studies. Some observations suggested that the initial question formation was simply prompting a 'word association' task and potentially restricting drawing as a tool to explore children's perspectives on play. On this basis, two questions were used in the final study. These offered an opportunity to explore different concepts of play as well as providing a concrete drawing task.

Q1. Will you draw me a picture of anything you can think of when you hear the word 'play'?

Q2. Will you draw a person playing?

Both drawings and children's comments demonstrated and challenged the efficacy of the questions in facilitating the production of (i) rich data, and (ii) relevant data. In comparison to the narratives, observations, and spontaneous drawings relating to play, some of the prompted drawings seemed very limited in information.

On account of these observations, we may ask ourselves if prompting children to draw is the best approach to accessing children's perspectives.

Here, we are faced with a methodological dilemma. On the one hand, the usual approach taken with visual methods is to promote creativity and self-expression. The approach usually focuses on broadening the scope and opportunity for responses by moving away from researcher-led methods and interview-style questioning. However, research specifically assessing children's responses to adult questioning advise that open-ended or very general questions, can be perceived by the child as highly open to interpretation thus confusing them as to what is expected in the form of a response (see 3.3.2). Therefore, we, as researchers, have the choice of either (i) giving the child freedom to draw whatever they wish and however they wish, the main risk here being that the child does not draw any of the topics directly related to the research study; or (ii) prompting the child with a specific question. The latter of these approaches raises the potential risk of dictating what the child will draw: for instance, 'Draw a girl playing with a ball' or 'Draw a boy playing on a computer'. By prompting the child, we may also restrict the richness of data. Nonetheless, with all these caveats, the alternative may have its own issues. For instance, if we leave the question open-ended, as I did, then we must acknowledge that alternative interpretations of the PQ are possible. It could be argued that these are of interest in their own right. As with any concept, individuals may have multiple views and experiences, drawing from different ones at different times. As demonstrated throughout my research data and ensuing discussion, an open-ended question can result in representations quite different to that which the researcher could have foreseen as images representing play.

### 8.3.2. *Children's perceptions of research task: social framing and contextual sensitivity*

From the child's perspective, what is the objective of the research task? Is it (a) to draw anything you think relates to play; or, (b) to draw a recognisable image of play? This is not an easy decision. Indeed, it may be a synthesis of the two. The first is being true to yourself: 'this is how I see play'. The problem with this approach is that adults may be unable to interpret the drawing as representing play. More specifically, the child has not drawn an easily discernible representation of play. The second approach is more restricting in that the objective here is to ensure the observer can interpret the drawing as a representation of play. Certain social situations could prompt participants to question their own interpretations of the task and questions in an effort to decipher what is expected of them by the researcher (Mauritzson & Saljo, 2001). Consequently, the picture could be seen to be a creation produced in an effort to please the researcher with a correct response rather than an authentic reflection of what is significant to the child.

If we consider this within a social semiotic framework, we can draw on Kress's theory in that the

...maker of the message now makes an assessment of all aspects of the communicational situation: of her or his interest; of the characteristics of the audience; the semiotic requirements of the issues at stake and the resources available for making an apt representation; together with establishing the best means for its dissemination. (Kress, 2010:26)

Informed by Kress's social semiotic approach, I attempt to gain insight into a child's interpretation of the research task. Despite this being my own interpretation, I am guided by Kress's notion of the motivated sign and have fused this with my observations pertaining to the child's perceptions of the research task, the researcher

and the research process described in Chapter 7. The four configurations of children's interpretations of the prompt question are outlined in Table 8.1. The aspect of Kress's (1997) theory which I draw from is that signs are always created with two interests. The first interest of the child (the creator) is their own interests and repertoire of representations. This is reflected in what aspect of play they choose to represent, and how. For instance, a child draws a person and a blue ball because this is what they like to play. It may be driven by their play interests and possibly their favourite colour. The child's second interest is the other: in this case, the researcher. Here, the child considers the researcher's prior knowledge and how this will influence what and how they need to represent something in order to successfully communicate the message. Therefore, the second interest is not focused on creating meaning, as this was the focus of the first interest, but rather the objective is to *convey* or *communicate* meaning. Here, interest is driven by what the creator perceives the other to bring to the communicative situation in terms of understanding drawing conventions as well as their knowledge of play. Therefore, the child may verbalise the action, 'This is me playing football' to ensure that the adult interprets their visual representation correctly.

As Table 8.1 shows, there can be great variation in children's interpretations of the research task and every child has a distinctive and innovative approach to representing play, whether this is the concept as a whole, or a specific aspect or image of play.

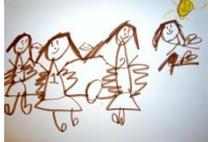
The main concern I raise here is that all the images featured in the table could be assumed as representing significant aspects of children's play. However, other than the first drawing by Eva which can be supported by other data and observations from my study, the other drawings do not necessarily reflect children's play. For example, conclusions from the 4-SASA of McKenzie's drawing did not necessarily suggest that she liked playing football. Nonetheless, the salient elements of the representation can

reveal significant aspects of play for the child. In McKenzie's case, these were social interaction, friendship, playing with her sister, and themes such as competition and loyalty (see Chapter 5 for full analysis). Therefore, children's drawings may warrant more in-depth analysis to understand which aspects of children's play are actually being represented.

Children's drawing processes demonstrated the complexities of representing play as a visual image, both in terms of producing a response in a particular semiotic medium and in terms of the decision-making process in choosing what aspect of this broad and diverse subject to represent. When a child is asked to draw a picture which may represent something quite general, in this case play, then it may be easier to represent a highly specific form of play, which can be anchored with an object and be easily interpreted by the other. Here, the primary interest is fulfilling the researcher's request rather than drawing exactly what they play.

In grappling with these concerns, we can begin to understand how the outcomes of the drawing process can vary significantly as a result of the child being prompted to draw certain subjects using particular prompt questions.

**A SUGGESTION OF THE CHILD'S INTERPRETATION OF THE RESEARCH TASK AND IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH DATA PRODUCED IN RESPONSE TO TASK PROMPT QUESTIONS: Draw a person playing & will you draw anything you can think of when you hear the word, 'play'?**

CHILD'S INTERPRETATION	SEMIOTIC INTEREST	CHILD'S DRAWING: EXAMPLE IMAGE
<p>'This is how <u>I</u> see play'</p> <p><i>i.e. 'what I (the child) think play is/looks like/means to me'</i></p>	<p><b>Own interest (the creator of message)</b></p> <p>Child's priority= representing play from own perspective</p>	
<p>'This is what the <u>researcher wants</u> me to draw about play'</p> <p><i>i.e. pleasing researcher with suitable image</i></p>	<p><b>Researchers' (interpreter/ receiver of message)</b></p> <p>Child's priority= representing play to provide a correct response</p>	
<p>'This will be how <u>most people</u> will see play'</p> <p>Drawing from previous knowledge and exposure to images of children playing-good vs. bad play, books, &amp; cartoons</p>	<p><b>Researchers' (interpreter/ receiver of message)</b></p> <p>Child's priority= representing play from perspective of others</p>	
<p>'This is the <u>easiest</u> thing for me to draw'</p> <p>Possibly viewing drawing skills as being judged</p>	<p><b>Own interest (the creator of message)</b></p> <p>Child's priority= providing the best representation as allowed by their own skills and drawing ability while still offering a related response</p>	

**Table 8.1:** An outline of children's possible interpretations of the research task and the effects on research data as representing children's perspectives on play.

#### 8.4. The methodological complexities of using children's drawings

Methods are often discussed as independent entities that are separate from the researcher or methodology. However, as I will discuss in the following section, the ways in which we approach data collection can significantly impact the efficacy of drawing as a research tool for accessing children's perspectives.

Firstly, I re-examine the notions of direct and indirect methods of data collection discussed in 2.5. I develop these and assign more specific terminology (in situ and by proxy) which I deem as more appropriate for encompassing the methodology and researcher's role in the process. I consider how these alternative approaches to data collection impact the type of data gathered while revisiting some of the main concerns identified in Chapter 7 such as using children's prompted drawings and how children's drawing process occurs beyond the two-dimensional image.

Children's drawing can be accessed using two distinct approaches: in situ and by proxy.

1. Drawing used as an *in situ* approach: The researcher is directly involved in or present during data collection i.e. they may gather free drawing or elicit specific drawing data within the research process through the form of a task or prompt.
2. *By proxy*: A method of data collection whereby drawings are gathered (typically) over a period of time using another method such as scrapbooks or a portfolio. In other words, drawings are not actively produced by means of a task or activity initiated by the researcher or teacher to generate data specifically for research purposes.

As Table 8.2 demonstrates, both approaches offer opportunities to collect children's prompted *and* spontaneous free drawings. Researchers need to be aware of these

distinct approaches and their effects on the types of data gathered, and what this allows in terms of analysis and interpretation.

	<b>PROMPTED DRAWING</b>	<b>FREE DRAWING</b>
<b>IN SITU</b>	Researcher prompting child-requesting child to draw something specific using a prompt question or discussion	Researcher present, but not instigating drawings. Child producing free drawings of own accord
<b>BY PROXY</b>	Parents/teachers prompting child to produce drawings-requesting child to draw with a prompt	Parents collecting children's spontaneous drawings over a period of time

**Table 8.2:** Approaches to gathering children's drawings.

Inevitably, there are benefits and caveats to both approaches. For instance, drawing as an in situ approach raises concerns pertaining to issues of power in that a different social context is created with the presence of the researcher. The drawing process may alter within this new social context, especially when given instruction or requested to draw something specific. The strength of using drawing as an in situ strategy is that the researcher has the benefit of seeing the entire drawing process, thus learning about the child and/or the topic of enquiry through a multimodal process of communication. Such richness in modes of communicative effort must all be taken into consideration as one may learn past, present and future meaning of the drawing and what it represents and how this relates to the child's world. As a result, all data gathered during the drawing process, such as conversation, narration, sound effects, gestures, role play, can be used to facilitate the interpretation of children's drawings, privileging the child's

drawing process, rather than the data solely being the final product. Indeed, an in situ approach is useful, and may even be necessary when attempting to access children's perspectives on topics which are perhaps more sensitive or do not commonly feature in children's spontaneous drawings such as content relating to war, health, or religion.

In contrast, a by proxy approach to data collection provides opportunities to gather naturalistic, non-commissioned drawings from children, produced within their own daily repertoires. This is a more naturalistic and unobtrusive method of data collection. The responsibility for data collection falls upon the parents, the child, or possibly teachers depending on the context of the research. However, there are issues of concern regarding this approach. Firstly, collecting children's drawings by proxy means that the researcher has no control over the content of drawings gathered. A very large number would have to be collected in order to use the data as a source of exploring a specific topic. This is not an issue if the research question relates to what children draw in general. However, if the research aim is to examine children's perspectives on particular subjects, then the data is limiting. There is also still a risk of gathering prompted drawings simply because of the families' awareness that data is part of a research study. Although there is no direct influence from the researcher, nor the added pressure from a structured research task or context, there may still be some selective data gathering on the part of the families. For instance, if the child is not a particularly frequent drawer, then the parents may prompt drawings to ensure an adequate quantity of data. Furthermore, the drawings which the researcher finally sees, may be the 'good ones' which parents consider of being a particular standard. For this reason, a main drawback with a by proxy approach is that the researcher will not necessarily be able to distinguish between free and prompted drawings.

If current theory and literature argue that children's drawing practice is a fluid, multimodal process, not product, then what can we obtain from their drawings in the absence of the accompanying process of its production? Cox (2005) emphasises that children may see drawing as an on-going activity where there is no definite end-point. Thus, the time period assigned for completing the drawing task must be flexible. Thompson (2009:31) reflects on these issues in her own work, stressing that 'what begins as a drawing may be accomplished through multiple languages, including several that leave no trace in the final product'. Within a social semiotic framework, the languages she talks of can be considered modes. And so we return to the underpinning ideas of multimodal communication and the way in which children's drawings are conceptualised within this framework.

Kress and van Leeuwen discuss preschool children's meaning-making practice from the onset, reminding us that: 'they [children in early preschool] have not yet learnt to confine the making of signs to the culturally and socially facilitated media', and for this reason are 'relatively unconstrained in the making of signs' (1996:7). What this implies is that children will always create meaning in a multiplicity of ways. If researchers are not present during this dynamic process of communication, then important aspects of the child's signification are lost. Researchers may obtain parents' and children's accounts of what the drawings mean during interviews or conversations, but Hall (2010:97) describes how '...the meaning the children attached to their drawings is also open to change with time and shifts in thinking'. For this reason, the meanings children assign to their drawings at this stage of the research process may have no relationship to their original intentions at the time of their production. Consequently, we may lose the richness of children's drawing practice by turning the method into an elicitation tool to access children's thoughts and feelings simply at the time of researchers' questioning.

These ideas are further developed by Mavers (2011:37) who warns

In the absence of the recipient of the text in the process of making and denied an opportunity for supplementary explanation, drawing (and writing) must be sufficient of itself to convey certain meanings.

This is an important point to consider as the concept of a particular mode being ‘*sufficient of itself*’ can be challenging for any individual. Furthermore, children may use drawing as a communicative device to different extents. What this discussion suggests is that the degree of meaning conveyed through the drawing alone, or the alternative modes occurring around it, can depend on the child’s own preferences for communication in that particular context and social situation. Some may convey additional information through role-playing the scenes from their static image while others may achieve this by showing the researcher the objects they are drawing. A number of the children in my study conveyed much of the meaning through verbal narrative generated during the drawing process. In contrast, a few conveyed all meaning within the image itself. This latter situation can be particularly challenging for the researcher when interpreting drawings. If these images are not discernible, then the added complexity of having no additional information makes ensuing analysis and interpretation very difficult. In the absence of important collateral information gathered from children’s commentary or responses, the drawings may require a substantial amount of adult interpretation. As the meaning systems of children can be very different from those of adults, projecting meaning onto children’s drawings could result in understanding the drawings from an adult perspective rather than the child’s (Angelides & Michaelidou, 2009; Woodhead, 1998).

For the child, the task of ensuring the correct interpretation of a drawing may be challenging when (i) they may not be present during adult interpretation, and (ii) they may not be aware of adult conventions for signs nor have the semiotic resource of formal text at their disposal to anchor their image with a written explanation. For example, at age four, many children are only just beginning to write their name. If we return to some of the discussion in section 3.7, we must remind ourselves that young children may have not yet learned or chosen to follow culturally conventional representations for particular objects or concepts. This is demonstrated in Figure 7.5b where Eva drew horizontal and vertical lined crosses to signify kisses rather than drawing the conventional diagonal lined 'x' symbol. Likewise, conveying an idea or experience pertaining to an abstract and dynamic concept such as play could be challenging when confined to a decontextualized two-dimensional image.

These issues will be further discussed in the following section within the context of *drawing play*.

### **8.5. Drawing as a method of (re)presenting play: what's so difficult about drawing play?**

Going beyond the practical benefits, we must consider the efficacy of drawing as a research tool in terms of meeting the researcher's original objectives and the production of desired data to answer research questions. In this study, relevant data would be considered drawings which revealed or suggested children's perspectives on play. The findings suggest that a request to draw play can be a complex task. Does one attempt to represent play as an entire concept? Or only represent one aspect such as an object or person to be played with? Or draw the context of a past play experience?

In what follows, we can begin to see how the relevance of data does not depend on realistic representations of play but rather in our ability to access the child's meanings within (or outwith) the image and explore its significance to children's play.

It could be argued that play is a unique subject to draw. The task of drawing play inevitably generates a vast array of approaches as well as being influenced by personal interest and play experiences.

Grappling with the concept of play can be analogized to trying to seize bubbles, for every time there appears to be something to hold on to, its ephemeral nature disallows it being grasped! (Moyles, 2005:4)

An abstract concept such as play may pose somewhat of a challenge when represented in two-dimensions. Indeed, this could be the case for any participant, regardless of age. On the one hand, it is a familiar part of most children's everyday lives. Yet on the other, it is an abstract concept with many possibilities and variations for interpretation, representations and conceptualisation. As discussed in Chapter 6, definitions and conceptualisation of play in practice, theory, or by professionals and parents creates a great diversity in personal views on what play should actually look like: be it in reality, or as a representation on paper. These assumptions can impact how we, as researchers, envisage play to be represented in children's drawings.

What is drawn by children in response to the prompt question, may, from their point of view, be an unquestionable illustration of play i.e. 'This is play'. While this may be the case for some children's drawings, others can pose more of an enigma to an external observer and so we require more information than the image in front of us. For instance, when we look at McKenzie's plane in Figure 7.15 it is not as simple as saying this is play.

A child's imagination is not captured by an object itself, but by the story which gives the object and the actions their meaning. (Lindqvist, 2001:7)

For this reason, we require the child's meaning attributed to this seemingly abstract representation of play. In the example I suggested above, McKenzie's drawing is telling us a story in which the context of an actual play episode has been illustrated. In other words, *this* is not play, but this is the location of a play experience.

My continual reflexivity begged me to question how I, as a participant, would approach the task of drawing something relating to play. Many images came to mind but some quickly dismissed as I judged them too time consuming to draw well or too complex to draw at all<sup>10</sup>. Here, it is worth clarifying that my decision-making process was guided by the desire of producing an image which would be easily, as well as correctly, interpreted by another; something not too abstract and open to interpretation. As social beings, representations are inevitably embedded in the social. So if we consider the drawing process as a communicative device within a social semiotic framework, then we can see how communicating a specific message, for instance, playing, will be guided by the child's personal interest (see Table 8.1), what they consider an appropriate image to convey the message, who is to interpret the representation, and how this individual may interpret it within the particular context in which it is created.

In summary the child

makes an assessment of all aspects of the communicational situation: of her or his interest; of the characteristics of the audience; the semiotic requirements of the issues at stake and the resources available for making an apt representation; together with establishing the best means for its dissemination. (Kress, 2010:26)

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<sup>10</sup> Complex representations in my opinion were most often imaginary or role-play scenes or games played with a few of the children during the visits such as 'Farms', 'Mums and Dads', Batman vs. monsters and so forth

These reflections, coupled with children's approaches to the research task, suggest that deciding what to draw in order to represent play was a complex task.

As discussed in Chapter 6, a great variety of representations were produced in an attempt to construct a visual illustration of play: from toys and pets, to abstract scribbles and unidentified people. One could argue that the ease of representing play is dependent upon the type or element of play being depicted. For this reason, the task becomes very different. Asking children to draw something they did that day, their favourite thing to play, or draw what they think play *is*, all demand very different things from children and their drawings. Although a child may understand or have substantial knowledge of a subject, anything that they depict on paper via the method of drawing will have varying limitations. These may include: their ability to draw certain concepts and objects; what they choose to draw; how easy a concept or object is to draw; and how they choose to draw it (style, favourite or familiar mediums, symbols or representations).

A drawing is a static object. Play, on the other hand, is not. For this reason, certain images may not reveal extensive information about the nature of particular play such as the dynamic fluidity of creative and imaginative play. This is reinforced by the fact that children usually enrich their drawings with dialogue, show-and-tell, sound effects, and role play. This suggests that as researchers we must consider the entire drawing process which facilitated the creation and meaning of the final product. Children's drawings are not neatly packaged in a final product. As a consequence, researchers require an awareness of the child's narratives, physical actions and verbal responses during the drawing process in order to reduce over- or misinterpretation. So although the researcher may easily interpret the child's drawing as a human figure, it is the next stage of understanding in which we access the child's signification attributed to the

figure. For instance, it may be a male figure, but who is it, why is it included in the drawing? Is it a best friend, father, fictitious character from a favourite cartoon or toy? This can be achieved by listening to the child's descriptions while drawing as well as an awareness of the significant figures who commonly appear in the child's drawings. Without the child's explanations and understanding of the representations used, our interpretations would inevitably result in a very different depiction of children's perspectives and experiences of play.

As a result of the third research question, 'What can drawings reveal about children's perspectives on play?' the study demonstrated that drawings can uncover children's unique ideas, experiences, and concepts of play. Drawing allows children to be creative and its malleable nature can offer children a limitless tool for representation. Children varied from drawing objects to illustrate their favourite toys or play things, to more complex representations of play scenes and abstract concepts. Drawing provided opportunities to explore what children liked to play, and at the same time, discover how a child may conceptualise play.

A unique possibility offered by the drawing is that objects, people, and scenes can be included which are not necessarily present or occurring at the time. In contrast, other research methods could limit our understanding of children's play on account of observations and photos only being able to capture what is reality and present at that moment in time. In other words, the method of drawing allows the researcher to access other aspects of children's play which may not be expressed or observed while playing in the context of the home or in the presence of the researcher.

For the purposes of the research task, children drawing their perspectives on play, there are two useful functions that drawing can serve. These are not necessarily distinct as a

child can use both in one drawing. Hence, the drawing created could be one of two representations:

1. Record of reality
2. Representation of thought, imagination and ideas

If we consider how the first relates to children's representations of play, then the child draws from memories of play episodes or actual objects in sight such as Charlotte drawing a ball or Eva drawing her horse. In contrast, if we consider the second function of drawing, a tool for representing thought, ideas, and imagination, then there is no limit to what children could represent as play. It could be anything distantly related to play, not to mention its transient and malleable state:

I'm not drawing a monster now...I'm gonna draw a flag... [humming while he draws the flag]...And the flag can turn into a shop.

Fynn's commentary while drawing (Transcription, 30<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2010)

In addition, we must acknowledge that drawing can be a demonstration of play itself. As a result, the behaviour exhibited during the drawing activity can elucidate what children perceive as play, playful behaviour, imaginary play, or what they see as amusing or entertaining.

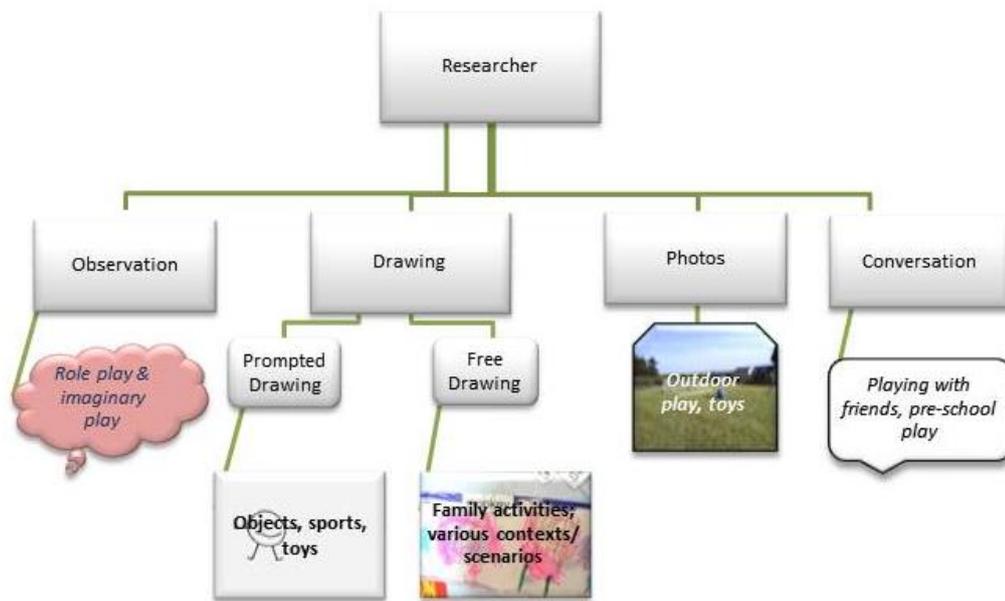
### ***8.5.1. Using children's prompted drawings: implications for practice and research findings***

In this section, I discuss the implications for researchers using prompted drawings as the basis for constructing children's perspectives, rather than utilising images children have initiated on their own terms.

As discussed in 8.4 researchers can use different approaches for gathering children's drawings. Consequently, researchers may obtain very different data from each approach. Figure 8.2 summarises the main methods used in my study. Beneath each method I have included a few examples of the typical information I obtained pertaining to children's perspectives on play through, for instance, my conversations and photos taken during the visits. The diagram illustrates how different methods, and in particular, how different applications of the same method can result in different research outcomes.

What are we potentially losing from using certain approaches with particular methods? It is important to state here that I am not comparing methods, nor am I suggesting one is more successful than the other. Rather, my focus is on the use of drawing and how we can access its potential as a communicative tool. Accordingly, the following diagrams attempt to illustrate the risk of gathering skewed or limited conclusions if only using children's prompted drawings as the basis for children's perspectives on play. Here, I return to the issues raised in Chapter 7. If we assume that prompted and free drawing are in fact distinct activities, which activity is a more effective communicative tool?

In this study, children's free drawings provided a rich pool of data pertaining to their perceptions and experiences of play. Scenes such as playing with friends, family, or toys commonly featured in their free drawings.



**Figure 8.2:** Diagram showing various methods of gathering children’s perspectives on play and how these can access different aspects of children’s play.

To revisit the theoretical approach of social semiotics while considering the issues surrounding the task of drawing on request, children’s prompted drawings imply a more restricted social framework, subsequently limiting the opportunity to fully utilise this semiotic vehicle. As a result, researchers who use only children’s prompted drawings may gather a constrained view of children’s perspectives on play on account of drawings most often showing tangible objects such as sports, toys or cartoon characters. For this reason, I questioned what was occurring during the *prompted* drawing activity in comparison to free drawing: was something being lost in the process of gathering children’s perspectives by prompting children’s drawings?

In terms of providing visual responses, studies caution that children’s pictures may be produced in an effort to please the researcher with a correct response. Therefore, *prompting* children’s drawings may remove or negate the valuable benefits which the process of FD can offer. To explore these ideas further, I refer back to the concept of

drawing as a semiotic vehicle within a social semiotic framework. As a social practice, free drawing could be conceptualised as a dynamic process of social interaction, encouraging children's natural tendency of multimodal meaning-making (Anning & Ring, 2004; Kress, 1997). Children have control over all aspects of the process and thus can follow their own agendas. In addition, the framing of this social event as relaxed with no pressure on 'performing' minimises the power imbalances which may exist between the child and adult in that both have control of their investment and level of interaction in the drawing process. Similar to that of the social situation created during our playtime together, the relationship is fun and friendly with no expectations from each other. I am not perceived as a figure of authority.

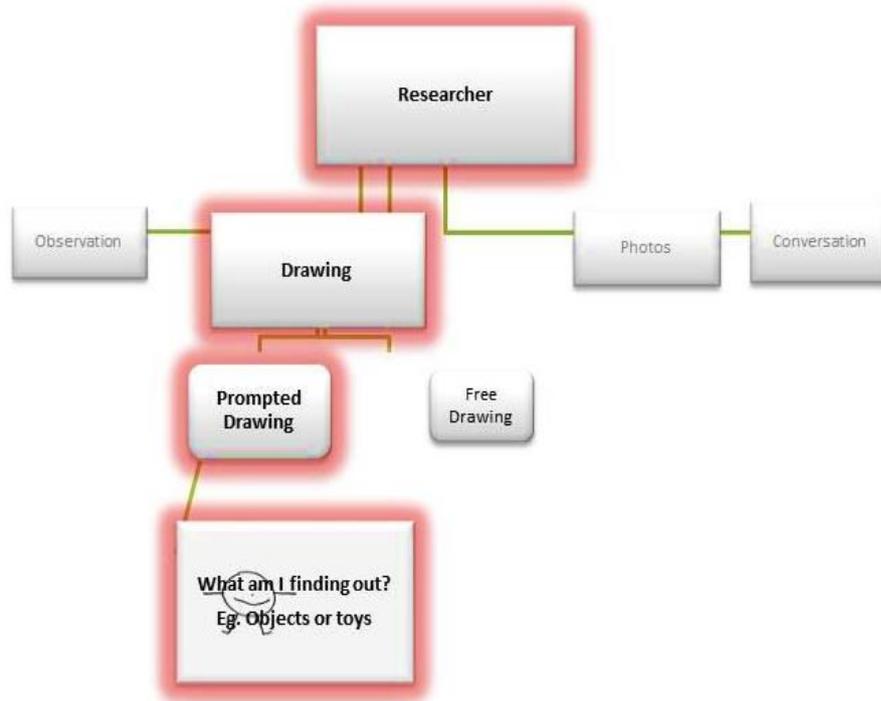
You're not a *lady*; you're just a big girl!

Conversation with Mia (Field notes, 17<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2011)

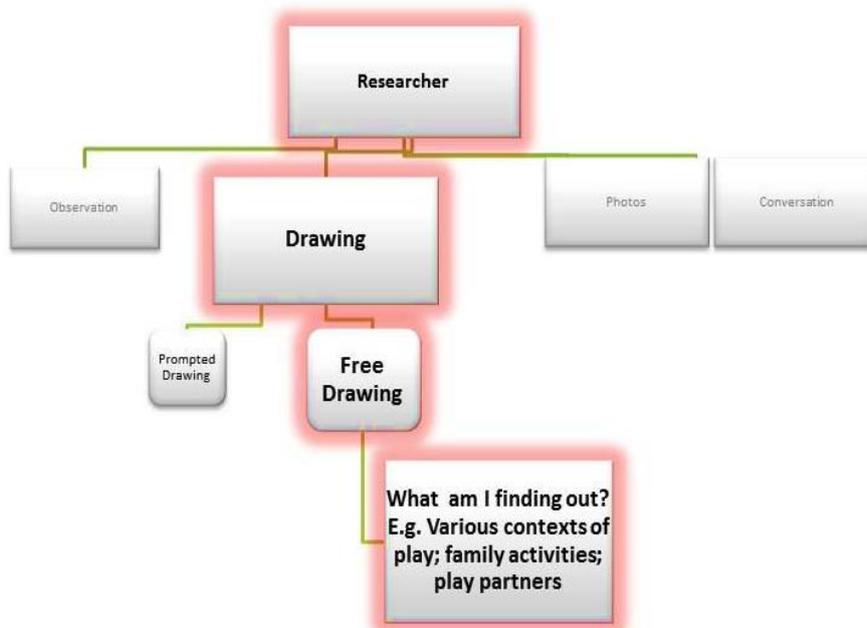
In comparison, the nature of a prompted drawing is that the activity requires a prompt, generally provided by the researcher. Literature addressing issues pertaining to research with children implies that we cannot avoid the power imbalance which exists between the child and the researcher as children continue to be a population under the control and guidance of adult figures (Punch, 2002). Consequently, the moment I ask something of the child, their awareness of me as an adult rushes to the foreground and so they may feel pressure to provide the correct response. The implications of this change the relationship between the researcher and child and consequently alter the social and contextual framing of the drawing process creating a more formal context in which particular structures and social roles exist similar to those existing within a formal educational setting such as a classroom. The roles individuals adopt within the complex social encounter of research must be not be underestimated (Woodhead &

Faulkner, 2008). Regardless of the participants' age or social positioning, the roles of researched and the researcher must be acknowledged so as to minimise the disparity of control and power within this unique situation. Therefore, while the distinction between free drawing and prompted drawing may not exist in the natural context of the home, it may surface in a research context.

Indeed, free drawings and prompted drawings may access different aspects of children's perspectives on play, all of which are significant. Therefore, I would conclude when using the method of drawing as a research tool for accessing children's perspectives, both free drawings and prompted drawings are included. By using both types of data, we can access a more comprehensive and richer account of children's play, their concepts and experiences of play.



**Figure 8.3:** Diagram replicating Figure 8.2 but here I emphasise how research using only children’s prompted drawings may produce a limited view of children’s perspectives on play. For instance, drawings may only contain tangible objects with minimal detail.



**Figure 8.4:** Diagram replicating Figure 8.2 but here I emphasise how research using only children’s free drawings may gather a different and possibly richer account of children’s perspectives on play.

If particular research approaches are applied such as using prompts with children during the drawing process, the researcher and the manner in which they are applying the method of drawing, a creative, flexible and adaptable method - all perfect criteria for working with young children - is possibly being treated in a highly structured and uncreative manner. For this reason, we run the risk of restricting the communicative value of drawing resulting in quite a one-dimensional representation of children's cultures of practice. In other words, what we may be gathering are 'superficial and sanitized glimpses of children's worlds' (Thomson, 2009:29); and in my case, a possibly flat illustration of the multifaceted and dynamic practice of children's play.

#### **8.6. Reflecting on gender differences in children's drawings and play**

Although gender was not a central aspect of my research or a focus throughout my analysis, the evidence presented in this section is resonant with the existing literature. Due to the small numbers in my sample I cannot generalise my findings in terms of gender differences. Nor can I draw definitive conclusions from drawings based on gendered activities of children which could have been achieved by using a measure such as the Preschool Activities Inventory to assess children's activity preference based on gender. However, with these caveats in mind, this section demonstrates how issues such as gender can be explored in some depth.

Upon further examination of all the drawings, a number of the girls' images could be described as more complex, colourful, and more detailed than others, demonstrating skill in representing human facial expressions, contextual information, and a maturity in use of fine motor skills. Studies have demonstrated that girls commonly include more

detail than boys when drawing human figures, draw more realistically, and are more subject-orientated (Cox, 1992; Koppitz, 1968; Tuman, 1999).

Based on the data charted in Table 6.1, on the whole, the boys in my study produced more drawings during my visits. There were two reasons for this. Firstly, some boys spent very little time on each drawing thus producing a large quantity of drawings in a short period of time. Secondly, boys were often content on drawing for the entire duration of the visit, rather than suggesting an alternative activity.

Girls were often vocal and candid about their preferences. Hence, the majority of first visits were spent playing and chatting rather than drawing. Girls also frequently expressed a desire to draw things 'correctly'. This meant drawings had to be drawn realistically or according to their own expectations and standards. Subsequently, new drawings were started, or representations had to be adapted to correspond to the new meaning children assigned. Furthermore, girls would often pause from drawing and chat, before returning to the image. If we consider the different functions of drawing then we could consider how drawing, as play, will reflect girls' play practice. This resonates with other research such as Blatchford et al. (2003: 500) who suggest that 'girls seem more likely to come together to socialize, independent of a game that might support their interaction' and that 'girls...would frequently interrupt their play for conversation'. Other research has demonstrated that girls exhibit a multimodal approach to artistic creations: narrating, playing, engaging in song, and employing a variety of mediums and materials in their creative process (Gardner, 1982). As a result, girls may take longer in completing their complex and creative pictures.

Girls often adopted the roles of observer, as well as the individual characters in the drawing: verbalising speech, interactions and relationships between the figures. These

observations mirror Wright (2010) who argues that girls tend to engage in character-based narratives while drawing.

A further observation was that not one drawing produced by the boys included family members, friends, or siblings. This echoes the observations of Iijima et al. (2001) who found that boys' drawings exhibit few human figures. Instead, boys drew fantasy and fictional scenes often adopting the role of detached creator or observer. These representations included decontextualized drawings of vehicles (Figure 8.5), worms, dragons (Figure 8.6), and characters from games and brands such

as Lego or SpongeBob SquarePants. In comparison, each of the girls in my study drew at least one picture involving family, best friends, or other people of significance in their present experiences such as me being featured in three of the girls' drawings (Figure 8.7).

Flannery and Watson (1995) suggest that gender differences in drawings arise from psycho-cultural differences such as gender-related education and social pressures to conform to gender stereotypes. Similarly, Malchiodi (1998:185) argues that

Society and culture certainly shape what girls and boys draw, and children's art expressions are formed, to some extent, by traditional gender roles and images of



**Figure 8.5:** Charlie's free drawing representing several independent objects rather than a composition to create a scene.



**Figure 8.6:** Charlie's dragon.

gender in the media and literature and impacted by gender values and beliefs of adults with whom children come in contact.

Therefore, it may not be as simple as concluding that boys prefer to *draw*, for instance, vehicles, monsters, or themes of good and evil. Instead, their drawings may convey what is of primary interest to them in their daily lives and play experiences and thus would emerge in any form of communication and expression.



**Figure 8.7:** Examples illustrating girls' drawings which often contained human figures signifying both personal relationships and figures from reality.

There is a wealth of research which demonstrates gendered preferences in children's play (Blatchford *et al.*, 2003; Francis, 2010; Gmitrova *et al.*, 2009; Hassett *et al.*, 2008; Holmes & Romeo, 2012; Jordan, 1995; Marsh, 2000; Riley & Jones, 2007). Studies exploring gendered play show that there are trends in girls' and boys' preferences of toys and leisure activities. Typically, children favour and play with resources which are stereotyped as own-gender (Cherney & London, 2006; Francis, 2010; Vickerius & Sandberg, 2006). Boys often choose toys which are marketed and stereotyped as 'boys toys' such as cars, and favourite toys include brands such as Transformers, Ben 10 and Lego (Francis, 2010). This was evident in the resources I observed in boys' homes and



**Figure 8.8:** Examples of boys' interests in computer technologies: TV and game console in Fynn's bedroom where he played his favourite Lego man computer game (left), and Charlie playing his Nintendo DS Lite (right).

their drawings. As well as the previously listed brands, others included WWF<sup>11</sup> wrestling figures, Batman, and Thomas the Tank engine. Research also suggests that boys prefer action, moving and manipulative toys, resources and activities which involve exploration, construction, rough-and-tumble play (Cherney & London, 2006; Francis, 2010; Sutton-Smith, 1997), and their play also predominantly involves fighting or chasing 'bad guys', and gendered narratives during fantasy play (Marsh, 2000). Other research suggests that boys show more interest in computer games (Cherney & London, 2006). This was the case for two of the boys in my study who expressed interest in playing their DS Lite, Xbox and specific computer games (Figure 8.8).

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<sup>11</sup> World Wrestling Federation



**Figure 8.9:** Examples of toys and resources which girls enjoyed playing: one of Mia's dolls (left), and Eva's cuddly toy horse (right).

It is argued that girls prefer to play with cuddly toys, dolls and named brands such as My Little Pony, Bratz and Barbie amongst their favourite toys (Francis, 2010). This reflected some of my observations where girls drew and played with 'Baby Annabelle', ponies and stables, and stuffed animals (Figure 8.9). Although Blatchford et al. (2003) focuses on playground play, their findings closely mirror the types of play and cultural influences represented in children's drawings produced in my study. For instance, boys' fantasy play was based on movies, cartoons, and computer games, while girls' fantasy play tended to be grounded in more stereotypically female or traditional themes such as 'mums and dads', babies, and horses. Nonetheless, there are some forms of play which research has demonstrated as not particularly gendered. These include: racing, playing Tag, hide-and-seek, and building dens (Blatchford *et al.*, 2003; Karsten, 2003).

It is important to note that young children do not tend to purchase their own toys. Consequently, the things children play with and are available to them will be dependent

on those marketed to and bought by parents and caregivers. Children may also gravitate towards toys and activities deemed appropriate for their own gender:

Boys and girls are being inculcated to different gendered worlds due to their distinctive gendered consumption of toys and leisure resources; indeed, that these entertainment resources facilitate the production and reproduction of gender. (Francis, 2010:340)

Others reinforce that play simply reflects the status quo. Therefore, the gendered practices in the family home, educational settings and society will influence and be reflected in children's play preferences and practices (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010).

### **8.7. A social semiotic lens for analysing young children's drawings: a 4-step approach**

The aim of this study was to explore drawings as a method of accessing children's perspectives. The variation, and on some occasions, simplicity of young children's drawings raised some unforeseen issues regarding analysis. Therefore, an important aspect of this investigation was to develop a principled approach to analysing and interpreting children's drawings.

Observations suggest that we should approach the interpretation of children's drawings with sensitivity. What is required is an awareness of children's motivations to ensure we capture their attempts to visually represent their perspectives. This may be expressed as behaviour, past experiences, or as more palpable illustrations of particular concepts. In addition, children's meaning systems can differ significantly from those recognised and used by adults. For this reason, our interpretations of drawings and their meanings could be markedly dependent on our familiarity with the symbols or

representations used by children. To understand the child's unique way of viewing the world, one must be cognizant of the child's cultural conventions in their communicative practices as well as having access to, or a record of, these during the drawing process.

Rather than proposing a new lens or theory for analysing children's drawings, I used Kress and van Leeuwen's theoretical framework (1996) for analysing visual images in order to develop an analytical technique which is easy to administer, replicate, and facilitates researchers' interpretations of children's perspectives on play as revealed by their drawings.

The analytical technique was an important outcome of the study and is discussed again within the context of original contributions in section 8.10. It was developed on account of my desire to use a method of analysis which was: systematic, contextualised and privileged children's signification.

The application of social semiotics to facilitate the interpretation of young children's drawings offered many benefits. The underpinning theory meant that drawing was acknowledged and valued as a meaning-making process rather than focusing on final product.

Because my 4-SASA is a step-by-step outline of analysis, it provides an explicit account of the analytical procedures that underpin my conclusions about children's perspectives as revealed by visual representations.

In summary, my explicit step-by-step technique:

- Ensures a rigorous and transparent technique for analysing children's drawings.
- Provides a method which researchers can replicate.

- Encourages consistency throughout analysis as each step is followed with every child's drawing.
- Provides a systematic and detailed description of children's representations enabling the researcher to interpret children's concepts, experiences, and understandings.
- Provides researchers with an analytical approach for using social semiotics as a framework for analysing children's drawings. This, in turn, enables researchers to utilize the multimodal nature of children's drawing practice thus acknowledging the entire process of drawing as well as embedding signs within the social.

The two key advantages of my 4-SASA for researchers are that (i) it allows for the child's own meanings to be at the forefront of analysis, and (ii) it provides a principled technique for analysing children's drawings within a social semiotic framework. The steps systematically construct the child's perspective on play by integrating the verbal responses, in which the child explicitly assigns meaning to or expresses their understanding of sign, with the criterial aspects of the image which have been chosen to represent the concept of play. It privileges the child's signification as analysis is based on the child's descriptions and explanations and only in the absence of this were my own interpretations applied. This also reflects epistemological concerns regarding children's rights as participants by preserving their thoughts, ideas, and opinions.

These steps result in a synthesis of meaning, conveyed through the drawing process and concluding in a socially embedded and unique view of the child's perspectives on play.

### **8.8. Using drawings as a research tool: reflections on ethical issues and research with children**

Throughout the thesis, a number of concerns arose pertaining to specific ethical issues concerning the use of drawings in research such as the pressures of being requested to draw something by an adult and the question of removing children's names from their drawings. Nonetheless, it is equally important to highlight the benefits of using drawing such as empowering the participant and minimising the adult role as a figure of authority (see Table 7.1 for overview).

Morrow and Richards (1996) state that it is vital for researchers to find ways of accessing children's views and experiences that address the associated ethical complexities of research with children. For example, Samuelsson (2004) suggests, props are almost essential for a child to express their perspective. Based on the evidence generated from using drawing as a research tool to access children's perspectives on play, a number of benefits were identified which suggest that the method may provide the researcher with a means of minimising the various ethical issues which arise when working with children. Hill (2005) suggests that if the objective of a research study is to appreciate children's experience within a qualitative framework then researchers should be guided by a number of important considerations. These include: 'protection', to minimise children's distress and ensuring contingency plans are in place if children become upset or do not want to participate in an activity; 'provision', where children should feel good about contributions; and 'choice and participation'.

Informed by Hill's (2005) consideration, this section summarises the main issues I consider important when working with young children and their drawings.

- Anonymity in drawings and the rights of choice and ownership

Based on Hill's (2005:81) fourth ethical consideration that 'children should make informed choices about...the boundaries of public, network and third-party confidentiality', the issue of anonymity and confidentiality is not clear cut. In the event of children writing their names on or *in* their drawings, should this be considered as not only a part of their meaning-making, but a symbol of ownership and identity? It could be argued that a name is a representation and symbol in itself and the inclusion or exclusion of it within a picture may have important signification for the child. The picture may lose important meaning to both the creator and the interpreter if names are removed. For this reason, I conclude that researchers should attempt to obtain consent for leaving children's names on their drawings if this does not put the child at risk in any way.

When we consider drawings as data produced within a research context, the question of ownership is not an easy one. Parents may feel that they are fully responsible for their child and what they do, and for that reason, have ownership of the artwork. On the other hand, the researcher may assert ownership of the data given that they were produced for the researcher, through the research process. Or it may be as straightforward as the owner is the creator, in this case, the child. Observations suggested that children felt at ease to express their dissent and choose to keep their drawings rather than give them to me.

Eva's mother asks, "Do you want to give this one to Pauline?" Holding up one of the drawings Eva had done that afternoon with me. After thinking for a moment, she replies, 'No. I haven't finished that one". I suggest that I could take a photograph of the drawing instead. Eva maintains that it is not finished and so did not want it to be photographed either. She suddenly begins sifting through the various drawings scattered on the table, "eeemmm...[still looking through the drawings] you can have [picks up one of the drawings]...THIS one!"

Drawing and conversation with Eva (Reconstructed from field notes, 29<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2010)

The extract above shows how Eva was candid in expressing her ownership of the data, knowing she had a right to withhold an unfinished piece. Nevertheless, in an effort to respect her mother's wishes, she offers an alternative drawing which I could have. Based on Hill's ethical considerations this choice of refusal or opting out of providing specific pieces of data should be respected.

These issues of ownership emphasise the need to consult with the child when attempting to gather the original pieces of data. If the researcher's objective is to respect the child's prerogative, then they need to be willing to adapt in certain situations. As suggested by Birbeck and Drummond (2005:584), 'Creating a supportive environment with uncritical acceptance of the child's responses is crucial in the establishment of attaining worthwhile, valid data'. In other words, be ready to take photographs of drawings in order to have records of the data, noting down any accompanying descriptions. In addition, researchers must accept that children may not want their drawings photographed nor may they offer explanations to their meanings. As a result, alternative means of communication should always be offered.

– Empowering children as participants

Observations from the study suggest that drawing minimises the researcher's role as a figure of authority. This is because drawing is an activity most commonly related to, and witnessed in, *children's* daily repertoire; rather than perceived as an activity associated with adult social practice. Therefore, the child can regard themselves as the expert in the activity.

Findings suggest that using free drawings as a tool for communication offers a less pressured social situation in which there are minimal social rules in which the child must produce an image. Free or non-commissioned drawings provide a forum to express thoughts, ideas, and experiences, much like an open-ended conversation, thus removing the pressure to respond immediately to a direct question and empowering the participant. The child also has the option of choosing things they draw well. Accordingly, they are free to demonstrate skill and expertise rather than attempting a possibly novel subject or topic which they do not enjoy drawing.

In addition, the study showed that by offering children the choice of participation and leaving activities open to their suggestions, children can express their dissent and preferences more freely. As I continually asked children if they were bored or wanted to do something else, children would articulate their preference:

Mia: I've had enough drawing. [placing her crayon back in the packet]  
 Pauline: Ok  
 Mia: We can go upstairs and play, "I keep your baby safe and baby Annabelle" [a game we were playing during the first visit]

Drawing and conversation with Mia (Transcription, 17<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2011)

In contrast, one boy produced endless pictures throughout my entire visit. He had expressed his desire to draw from the onset and when I had given him the choice of using the materials I had brought or his own if he had any; he eagerly retrieved his own pencil case:

Pauline: Oh, that's from a 'Nightmare Before Christmas' [Tim Burton film inspired illustrations on his pencil case]  
 Fynn: Guess what's inside it?  
 Pauline: Is it a toy?...or cards...?  
 Fynn: [Unzips the case] PENS!!  
 Pauline: Pens! Wow, that's cool.

Drawing and conversation with Fynn (Transcription, 30<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2010)

Thus conversing with children and respecting them as equals can encourage them to interact, express opinions, and, to return to Hill's (2005) recommendations, 'feel good about their contributions'.

It could be argued that many other activities could be used as ice-breakers or to facilitate conversation and build rapport with children. Observations demonstrate that unlike some other methods such as questionnaires, worksheet or games, there are no strict rules or predetermined structure as to how the child must begin, produce, and end the task. There is no scoring system, no end point, or specific goal. This allows a higher degree of autonomy and freedom for children to approach the task of drawing as they wish. As McKenzie states while drawing, 'I'm colouring this bit any colour I like!' (Transcription, 25<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2010). Therefore, every shape, stroke and colour was produced and devised from the child's mind rather than composing something from predetermined images such as collage materials or other games and activities. Drawing offers a tangible product and, with it, a sense of ownership. In addition, children can control the length of time spent on the activity, the level of interaction and materials used as well as the meanings conveyed through or within them. This control over the situation allows children to spend as much or as little time on the task as they wish, as well as deciding how and when it is completed. The flexible and unrestricted nature of drawing allowed the tasks to be child-led and maintain engagement with the task through the possibility of leaving a drawing then coming back to it later.

– Drawing *with* children

Drawing with the child (if suggested or agreed by children) can offer valuable benefits. It can minimise some of the ethical concerns raised in Chapter 3 such as adult-child roles and issues of power between the researcher and the researched. I found that by

sitting on the floor at the same physical level as the child, it created a more intimate and relaxed social arrangement and removed focus from the child as ‘performer’. Drawing with children can also strengthen the relationship on account of both parties engaging in an activity together. Consequently, the research ‘task’ is completed by the researcher and the child. Finally, drawings can create space for the child: firstly, in the form of a blank sheet of paper to play with their ideas and express (or withhold) their views and responses; and secondly by allowing a comfortable distance between the researcher and the child.

– Research in the home

Carrying out the research within the context of the child’s home meant that there was more flexibility pertaining to new ethical concerns arising through the research process. Communicating directly with families meant I could return to them and inquire about obtaining revised consent regarding the specific data I had gathered.

This context also positioned the researcher as a guest within the child’s home. Consequently, the child can show the researcher around the house or invite them to participate in their own activities such as playing a computer game. These observations suggested that children were autonomous individuals within this context and so minimised the adult-child power imbalances which can often exist in research situations (Danby *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, children would often express their preferences which I would always acknowledge and thus adhered to a child-led approach.

Drawing within particular research contexts can be unfamiliar or uncomfortable for children. In contrast, the home has been described as a more relaxed and natural environment in which to engage in drawing as well as having fewer expectations of particular conventions and standards for visual output/representations (Anning, 2002).

Despite the advantages of conducting research in the home, this context can also create ethical challenges (Plowman & Stevenson, forthcoming).

### **8.9. Using drawing as a research tool for gathering children's perspectives: summary**

Researchers have taken a particular interest in children's drawings as an alternative means of representing and communicating knowledge and perspectives. However, a review of literature revealed that researchers routinely use drawings as a way of obtaining data without considering the drawing process or the function of drawings within the research study. Accordingly, this research aimed to explore drawing as a research tool for accessing young children's perspectives and had three central research objectives which considered methodological and analytical factors relating to the use of children's drawings as a research tool. These were:

- To develop a principled approach to analysing and interpreting children's drawings
- To create guidelines for the use of drawing as a research tool
- To gather children's perspectives on play through the method of drawing

The research objectives were achieved by answering the following three questions:

- How can children's drawings be analysed using a principled approach?
- What are the major factors to be considered when using drawing as a research tool?
- What can drawings reveal about children's perspectives on play?

The thesis exemplified the methodological complexities of using drawing as a research tool. The research identified a number of key factors which researchers need to

consider when using drawing as a method of accessing and constructing children's perspectives suggesting that care needs to be taken during data collection and interpretation. Rather than routinely selecting drawing as a method for representing children's perspectives, researchers need to be more thoughtful about the ways in which factors such as context, children's perceptions of the research task, representing abstract topics, and prompting children to draw can affect research outcomes. Our understanding of children's drawing process and the approaches we adopt for gathering drawing data will have implications for the analysis we can perform as well as the types of data we have to facilitate our interpretation of visual data. The main considerations are:

- The framing and structure of drawing activities (e.g. context, social framing, audience, presence of researcher, prompt question, materials).
- The child's perception of the research process (purpose/ function of drawings, reasons for researcher's visit and interest in child, or child-adult roles).
- The task of representing abstract concepts or topics with multiple and broad definitions.
- Ethical issues specifically pertaining to children's drawings.
- The added complexity of analysis in the absence of accompanying narrative or descriptions and the need to ensure the analytical technique is relevant for data produced if the objective is to prioritise what children are trying to convey through their drawings.
- The information and data which we have to facilitate our interpretation and analysis can be dependent on the methodological approaches we adopt such as:

- Using free or prompted drawings
- Using an in situ or by proxy approach to data collection
- The ways in which we allow or restrict opportunities for children to express through different modes may affect the richness of data gathered. It requires methodological and analytical approaches which encourage children's dynamic meaning-making practices. Otherwise, there is a risk of obtaining what a child perceives as the easiest representation of the topic of enquiry rather than what they consider as most relevant or significant.

Findings reinforce the need to focus on what children do and create during the drawing process rather than focus solely on the final product. I conclude that if researchers use drawing as a research tool with young children to fulfil the specific objective of accessing children's perspectives, then we should include both free drawing and prompted drawing. This is based on observations that despite both having the potential to elucidate rich and insightful elements of children's perspectives on play, each approach may generate very different results. By using FD, we can observe the child's drawing within a spontaneous creative framework, gathering a diverse collection of pictures. By using PD, we can access children's views on a specific topic which may not commonly feature in children's drawings. Furthermore, if the researcher using a prompt along with an in situ approach, they witness the children's drawing process thus can access dynamic meaning-making processes.

### **8.10. Original contribution to knowledge**

This final section demonstrates the originality of these contributions as well as suggesting limitations and future considerations for the research.

### ***8.10.1. The development of a principled approach to analysing children's drawings***

Based on the lack of worked examples demonstrating how young children's drawings can be analysed using social semiotics, I developed a principled method of analysis which could be employed with children's drawings (Ch. 5). My approach offers researchers an analytical tool to facilitate the interpretation of children's perspectives as revealed through their drawings. This contributes to the existing research using social semiotics as a method of analysing drawings by providing an innovative and principled approach to using the framework as a technique for the analysis of preschool children's drawings. I also outlined how the core theoretical principles of social semiotics apply to drawing practice (Table 5.1) thus reinforcing the theory's aptness as a framework for analysing children's drawings.

It is important to note that although the focus of my analysis was to access children's perspectives on play, the same 4-SASA can be used to investigate any topic. In these circumstances, one would follow steps one to three as described in section 5.4, and then step four would focus on the researcher's main topic of inquiry. Alternatively, if the researcher did not have a specific focus such as studies investigating children's multimodal practices or *what* children communicate in their drawings, then the first three steps of the 4-SASA would be followed. Then, rather than focusing on a predetermined topic of interest in step four, the researcher would extract the main themes arising in steps one to three as revealed by children's drawings.

Lastly, the 4-SASA can be used with any type of drawings including those produced by adults and older children.

***8.10.2. Developing our understanding of children's conceptualisation, experiences and understanding of play***

The study contributes to and develops our understanding of children's conceptualisation, experiences and understanding of play. The specific areas of contribution include the following:

- Adding to research specifically exploring *preschool* children's perspectives on play suggesting that
  - a. Children link play to physical activity, playful behaviour, enjoyable activities chosen by the child and activities and events engaged in with others.
  - b. Central aspects of play include social interaction, amusement, and tangible objects such as toys or equipment.
  - c. Play can include adults, pets, family members, or fictitious characters.
  - d. Children have specific preoccupations in their play such as a particular toy, recurring themes such as good and evil, or a special play partner.
  - e. Boys' play tends to involve themes such as life and death or good and evil, and includes fantasy worlds, exploration, and fictitious characters from cartoons.
  - f. Girls' play tends to include family members and friends and involved themes such as friendship, caring for others, and mischief.
- Elucidating the impact of children's interpretations of the research task on the data produced and our constructions of children's perspectives on play (see Table 8.1).

- Contributing to research being carried out on play in the context of the child's home.

### ***8.10.3. The development of methodological understandings and practices of using young children's drawings as a research tool***

This research contributes to methodological understandings and practices of using young children's drawings as a research tool. The study provides original contributions to the following areas of knowledge:

- The research will contribute to current literature which begins to identify the caveats and complexities of using children's drawings as a research tool.
- The research raises concerns regarding the use of children's prompted drawings.
- The research identified two alternative approaches to gathering children's drawings: by proxy and in situ (Table 8.2).
- The study provides a comprehensive list of important considerations when using drawing as a research tool (Appendix 5). These emerged from the fieldwork and take account of various aspects of the research process such as practical tips for working with young children and ethical issues pertaining to visual data.

### **8.11. Limitations of study**

The research was limited to a UK sample and due to the low numbers, was not diverse in terms of ethnicity. In addition, on account of the small sample, the findings cannot be generalised to children as a population. This was not one of my research objectives;

instead, I have encouraged researchers to consider children as individuals thus approaching each research study willing to be flexible and adapt to the individual child.

Although gender was not a central aspect of my research or a focus throughout my analysis, there were some noticeable aspects of children's drawings and drawing process which warrant further discussion or future study. Due to the small numbers in my sample I cannot generalise my findings in terms of gender differences. Nevertheless, I have offered general observations throughout the findings both in terms of factors that may influence young children's drawings and important gender differences which could warrant future investigation.

### **8.12. Future considerations and implications for practice**

The findings from my research inform us of caveats linked to using drawing as a method of gathering perspectives from young children. The research supports previous studies in terms of various external factors influencing children's drawings. However, it also raises some under-researched issues such as conducting research with children in the home context, the task of drawing abstract concepts, and concerns surrounding the issues of prompting children to draw.

The methodological and analytical issues addressed in this study are not restricted to this context or this specific sample (preschool children at home). These issues should be considered in any setting or application of the method such as educational contexts or in health or science research. In addition, researchers should consider the same factors such as context, the participant's perception of the research task, or drawing abstract topics regardless of the population with whom they are working.

Findings from this study suggest some areas of interest which could form the basis of future research as they may have significant implications for the use of drawings within both educational and research contexts. From the key issues identified, I draw attention to one of the principal research outcomes: the fundamental issue of researchers using prompted drawings as the basis for constructing children's perspectives. I recommend that researchers utilise both free and prompted drawing activities for a richer and broader account of children's perspectives. However, my findings also suggest that if children's free drawings are gathered by proxy, then researchers need to make necessary measures to ensure that the drawing process and children's personal signification for drawings is documented. One route which researchers could take to achieve this is by parents, teachers or playworkers noting any descriptions or conversation generated during the drawing process on the reverse of children's drawings. Alternatively, the same process could be carried out using methods such as: mobile phones (Plowman & Stevenson, 2012); audio and video messages which children could create themselves then send via email to the researcher; or weekly blogs documenting drawings and conversation. This approach would avoid children's drawings serving as an elicitation tool to access children's thoughts at the time of researchers' questioning, or having to base meanings on parents' accounts.

Another key area that warrants further examination is the use of my 4-SASA on drawings produced by other age groups and within different contexts. It would also be beneficial to assess its efficacy in studies with different research objectives such as the exploration of children's general multimodal social practices. A more general future recommendation is that researchers should be more explicit about the analytical procedures that underpin their conclusions about children's perspectives as revealed by visual representations. It is only in doing so that we can replicate, develop and improve

our own analytical techniques and subsequently our interpretations and constructions of children's perspectives as revealed from their drawings.

### **8.13. Final thoughts**

The study showed that the implementation of drawing as a research tool can offer great benefits to the researcher and research process such as engaging and empowering the child, facilitating interaction, and other practical benefits. Drawing allowed the child to respond in their own time and on their terms, while forming their own narratives. They provide an opportunity for children to express their views and ideas and a means of structuring these by (i) allowing time to draft and formulate ideas, (ii) having the gratifying option of revising representations and discarding 'draft' drawings, and (iii) being a multimodal forum to express their perspectives. Nonetheless, it should be noted that many of these benefits are only relevant if a child-led approach is adopted and researchers adapt to children's preferred means of communication, allowing children to guide the structure of research activities. In addition, research approaches and methodologies must suit the objectives of the research and thus there are no set prescriptions to using drawings with young children. As stated at the onset, drawing may not suit every child, in every context. Therefore, I simply invite researchers to view children as having their own unique concepts, expectations and judgments of the context, the researcher, and social framing of tasks. For this reason, we must remind ourselves that the communicative potential of drawing is very much a situated affair and that the theoretical and methodological approaches we adopt will inevitably impact the ways in which we construct children's perspectives from visual representations. If we fail to consider the contexts in which children produce drawings, then we, as researchers, risk misinterpreting the meanings they convey. Kress emphasises 'the

world narrated' is very different from 'the world depicted and displayed' (2003:2). For this reason, the method itself will influence how children represent, and how *we* interpret, their perspectives on play.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Pre-pilot study, January 2010

The pre-pilot was carried out in January 2010. The study was conducted in the family homes of two children aged five years. Both children attended a local primary school. The sample was accessed through friends or contacts who expressed an interest in partaking in the study (see Table A1 for a summary of the sample). Data collection involved one visit to each child's home. Visits were approximately 90 minutes in duration. The visits began with general conversation regarding play and free drawing. During this time I also showed the child all the drawing materials I had brought for them. Once the child seemed comfortable in my presence and expressed an interest in using the drawing materials, I invited them to draw a picture of themselves playing, or whatever came to mind when they heard the word, 'play'. The prompt question, 'Will you draw a picture of anything you can think of when you hear the word 'play'?', was based on a similar version exploring the topic of recess by Angelides & Michaelidou (2009), who illustrate that 5 year olds can follow through on instruction of evoking thoughts in association with a specific word.

Once finished, their picture was discussed to explore various aspects of what was drawn. The drawing activities were recorded using a digital video camera.

The drawing task was carried out in the family's living room. In Lilly's case, the father, grandmother, and sibling were present at the time of drawing, while the mother was in another room. During Ben's drawing task, only the mother was present while his brother and a friend played in an adjacent room.

Findings revealed the potential of drawing, as well as caveats, in regard to external factors and their influence on the data produced. The observations and reflections emerging from the pre-pilot led to the ensuing modifications and finalisation of the pilot procedure.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Siblings</b>	<b>No. of Visits</b>	<b>Procedure</b>
<b>Lily</b>	F	5.7	Younger sister (2)	1	Free drawing, conversation, and free play
<b>Ben</b>	M	5.4	Older brother (9)	1	Free drawing, conversation, and free play

**Table A1:** Overview of pre-pilot

## **Appendix 2: Pilot study, May - June 2010**

### **Sample**

Six children (across four families) aged four to six years old. All children were due to start school in August 2010, barring Max who was in Primary 1.

### **Apparatus**

- Drawing materials: paper, pencils, crayons, coloured pens.
- Collage materials: backgrounds, images, blu-tac.
- Recording equipment: still digital camera, digital video camera, note book.

### **Procedure**

Six children were visited on two to three occasions within their homes, each visit lasting approximately 90 minutes. The first visit involved rapport building and familiarisation through child-initiated play and free drawing. The second visit consisted of drawing and collage tasks.

Visit 1: Building rapport with child and family through conversation, free drawing, and play, and familiarisation to equipment, drawing materials and researcher.

Visit 2: Included a drawing task and a collage task. Both tasks were initiated with two versions of same question.

**Q1.** Will you draw (make) a picture of anything you can think of when you hear the word ‘playing’?

**Q2.** Will you draw (make) a picture of anything you can think of when you hear the word ‘play’?

The objective here was to explore the concepts of ‘play’ and ‘playing’. In other words, I wanted to find out which was more appropriate in relation to the child’s understanding of the task and play.

Reflections relating to wording of the task questions concluded in a new format which was used with the third family. The new question was as follows:

**Q1 (revised).** Will you draw a picture of a person playing?

The tasks were digitally video recorded, and photographs were taken of children’s toys, artwork, playthings, and various areas in the house such as the child’s bedroom, garden, or setting of drawing activity.

All six children were visited in their homes on two occasions with the exception of Tess (first child), who was met on three occasions. However, on reflection, three visits were seen as unnecessary with the other children on the basis that two visits offered ample time for familiarisation and task completion.

**PILOT OBJECTIVES**

To support child-led interaction, activities, and decision-making.

To explore the format of questioning used to initiate drawing task - What am I asking the child to do? Am I obtaining the relevant data?

To consider if, and how, the presence of parents (i) affects children’s drawings and responses, and (ii) facilitates or hinders child-researcher interaction?

To test multiple visits for rapport building. Do more visits equal more data? Better data?

To trial methods: Are methods engaging? Are they flexible? Can they adapt to children’s needs and preferences? Do they generate data to answer research questions and achieve research objectives?

To test the use of collage as a research tool.

To identify what aspects of ‘Play’ or ‘Playing’ am I concerned with? E.g. concrete or abstract concept, children’s experiences, likes and dislikes?

To develop aspects of the procedure during preliminary visits.

**Table A2:** An overview of my pilot objectives

**Table A3:** Overview of pilot study

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Siblings</b>	<b>No. of Visits</b>	<b>Procedure</b>	<b>Data Collected</b>
<b>Ellie</b>	F	5.1	Twin brother, older brother	2	Visit 1: Free drawing/ play Visit 2: Drawing/ collage tasks	Observations, field notes, children's drawings, photographs of contexts, video recordings of drawing activities, and FBIF
<b>Harry</b>	M	5.1	Twin sister, older brother	2	Visit 1: Free drawing /play Visit 2: Drawing/collage tasks	As above
<b>Juliet</b>	F	4.2	2 older brothers	2	Visit 1: Free Drawing /play Visit 2: Drawing task [Use of revised prompt question]	As above
<b>Max</b>	M	6.3	Older brother, younger sister	2	Visit 1: Free Drawing/play Visit 2: Drawing task [Use of revised prompt question]	As above
<b>Sophie</b>	F	5.3	Older brother	2	Visit 1: Free drawing /play Visit 2: Drawing/collage tasks	As above
<b>Tess</b>	F	4.10	2 older siblings	3	Visit 1: Free drawing/play Visit 2 & 3: Drawing/collage tasks	As above

**Appendix 3: Thumbnails of all children's prompted drawings**

Appendix 3 and 4 are digitised thumbnails of all the children's drawings. The drawings are organised alphabetically by child, as well as portrait-oriented drawings being displayed first.

An important aspect of my research was examining approaches for gathering children's drawings. Therefore, I have presented children's prompted drawings separately as these were produced in response to a prompt question and so I consider these as different from the free drawing data which were produced by children of their own accord. Children's free drawings are presented in Appendix 4.



Charlie



Mia



Tyler



Charlie



Charlotte



Charlotte



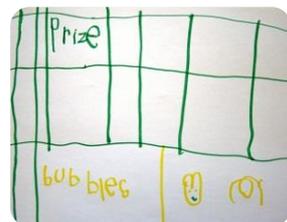
Ethan



Ethan



Eva



Eva



Fynn



Fynn



McKenzie



McKenzie



Mia

**Appendix 4. Thumbnails of all children's free drawings**



Charlie



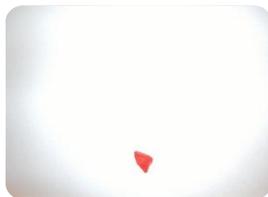
Charlie



Fynn



Charlotte



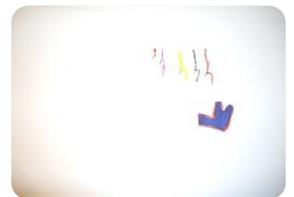
Charlie



Charlie



Charlie



Charlie



Charlie



Charlie



Charlie



Charlie



Ethan



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## **Appendix 5. Using drawings as a research tool: considerations and recommendations**

The aim of this research was to explore the use of drawing as a method for accessing young children's perspectives. This appendix presents some recommendations on how researchers can maximise the method's strengths, while minimising possible weaknesses. These practical recommendations are based on my observations and findings, as well as building on existing methodological concerns when conducting research with young children and their drawings. It is important to emphasise that some of these recommendations have been discussed in various studies with young children and are important regardless of the method employed. For this reason, some of these are not new but routine aspects of the research process which can at times be overlooked. This is not a prescription for using drawing as a research tool with young children, but a list of considerations which can prompt critical reflection when using the method; offering a starting point for researcher to then adapt in accordance with their particular research objectives.

### **✓ Rapport**

- The first step to accessing children's perspectives is to build rapport with the child. Two important outcomes should be trust and comfort. The child should feel at ease in the researcher's presence. As a result, the child will be more likely to engage in conversation, drawing, or other

activities. Props and toys are good ice-breakers, as well as showing willingness to play.

✓ **Take a relaxed and flexible approach**

- Allow children to structure the drawing context and conditions by asking questions or observing their natural drawing practice. Activities will then reflect the child's natural drawing practice. This will also encourage meaningful and engaging participation.
- It is important to acknowledge that as unique individuals, every child will take a different length of time to complete, engage in, or become comfortable with various research tasks and activities.
- Each child will also have varying degrees of focus. For example, one child may spend half an hour on one activity or one drawing, while another will spend a few seconds, then want to move on to something else.

✓ **Provide an assortment of good quality materials**

- Children will become frustrated if pencils or crayons break, or they are only given a drawing utensil which may not be their usual medium.

✓ **Conditions for drawing**

- Contexts which value and facilitate exploration and self-expression can encourage natural drawing practice.

- The activity should reflect the child's preferred conditions such as drawing in silence, drawing and playing, or drawing while conversing.
- ✓ **When possible, use children's spontaneous drawings rather than prompted drawings**
- Prompted drawings may provide less information due to the social framing of the activity- children may feel more restricted in what and how they draw in comparison to the freedom allowed by spontaneous drawing.
  - Prompting children to draw may alter the child's perception of the adult's role therefore feeling pressure to provide a correct response and as a result, may alter what and how they draw.
  - Prompts change the function and communicative value of drawing.
  - Conclusions from the study suggest that a more relaxed, and discussion based drawing activity can be more effective, where free drawings are generated from discussion around a specific topic rather than using a direct and structured prompt question.
- ✓ **Document the entire drawing *process***
- Children create and convey meaning in many ways during the drawing process using song, dance, verbal commentary, facial expressions, and role-play. For this reason, it is important to use these different forms of expression in our interpretations and understanding of children's

drawings. This can be acknowledged through detailed note-taking, or video recording the multimodality of children's meaning-making.

✓ **Be aware that drawing is a complex task which can be influenced by the following factors:**

- Peers- children may conform to those around them.
- Context- relaxed and familiar vs. structured or unfamiliar.
- Child's perception of the research task and researcher's agenda.
- Topic of drawings- concrete (Draw a teddy bear) vs. abstract concepts (Draw play).

✓ **Pilot methods and activities**

- It is important to investigate the limitations or challenges in aspects of the research process such as the presence of parents or siblings, methods of consents, or familiarity with equipment.
- Piloting can facilitate the development of methods, rapport building techniques, and methodological approaches.