

Teaching Drawing: A Buckinghamshire Working Paper

“Drawing is an activity which produces a great variety of outcomes. It is making marks on a surface, with or without line, with or without colour, with or without black and white, with tools and selected surfaces or dispensing with them, with or without prior aim and purpose. It shades off, with no clear distinction, into painting, low relief carving, etching, computer graphics, and many other activities in science and engineering.”

Leslie Perry¹

Introduction

There are many different reasons for drawing. This paper refers explicitly to drawing from first hand observation or experience. Other kinds of drawing serve to develop and research ideas (designing) or to express ideas, feelings and emotions. Young children will use drawing as a means of symbolic discourse akin to play with which to pursue and order their world.

Drawing from first hand experience will improve the confidence with which other types of drawing is undertaken. Often it will overlap or act as a prelude to other types of drawing. Drawing from first hand experience is often done to focus attention upon, and to record, what is seen. In this sense it is a record of the experience of looking carefully. The important thing to remember is that this type of drawing is primarily about the process of looking, investigating, reflecting and seeing. The final drawing on paper is the end result of this process but it is not necessarily the primary purpose of the activity. Drawing from first hand experience is not about simple description it necessarily involves a personal response and an element of interpretation. It is always a mistake to think of a drawing as simply an exercise in the technical skill of drawing.

The development of drawing is often inextricably bound up with the keeping of a sketchbook – which is primarily a process not an artefact.

“It’s purpose is to hold the learner longer in the presence , to prolong the period of attentive looking and to allow time to relate what is known, told or seen.”

Maurice Rubens, Mary Newland²

“ I may live in an age of photography and films, but what I do could not be photographed, because I don’t in fact copy objects. Instead I observe an object and then regurgitate it. It has passed through the ‘sausage mincer’ of my consciousness. If that is interesting then it acquires interest”

Erich Bauer³

“In learning to draw you learn to look. You teach yourself to see and to feel what you see. Drawing is a more interesting way than writing of passing on feelings about the world you see because it is closer to what we actually feel.”

David Hockney⁴

“...too often, in primary schools the aim of drawing is ‘to make a drawing’ rather than to use it as a means for communication and thinking or for the expression of ideas and feelings”

Robert Clements⁵

Teaching Drawing

When teaching this type of drawing there are three major factors for the teacher to consider.

The first is to review of the relationship between the task and the materials to be used. This includes a pragmatic consideration of the appropriateness of drawing materials to be used. The way they work together and their relevance to the purpose. For instance the significance of the texture and colour of the paper to the use of either chalk or an ink fineliner pen.

The second is the way in which the pupils will be encouraged to see and think about the task. Talking about drawing is important. The teacher will use questioning to focus attention and direct attention. It may be helpful to provide some relevant examples of drawing styles and techniques to help this discussion. These examples may be the work of famous, dead, white, male, European artists - but they don't have to be. Interesting and useful drawings can be found in newspapers, children's books, magazines etc.

The third is the choice and presentation of the objects, images or environments to be explored through drawing. In one sense this relates to the sense of drama and excitement surrounding the task – the careful cutting in half of a cabbage or pepper, for instance. It can be achieved by bringing strange or unusual objects into the classroom. The objects may, of course, be ordinary in their normal context but unusual in the context of the classroom – a car jack, spare wheel or bicycle, mackerel, cherries, for instance. The presentation of objects or places is a question of ensuring that everyone can see, that the lighting is providing shadows, that the background does not intrude.

1 Materials

The Medium

What is the best medium for the task?

Teachers will need to think about what they are asking children to do and to learn about and then choose an appropriate drawing medium. For instance chalk and charcoal are very good for tonal drawings with lots of shadow while pen and ink (felt, biro etc.) are good for line drawings. Pencils are good for carefully controlled drawing using line, tone and texture. However, the grade or softness of the pencil will make a lot of difference. If there is a great tonal range then soft pencils (6b) will be helpful. However, detailed textures or pattern may be better with a medium pencil (2b). Simple marking out may be better with an hb although this is really too hard for most drawing tasks.

Graphite sticks are very good for large gestural drawings with lots of vigorous movement tones and marks. Some good drawings can be done with twigs dipped in ink or paint. These give a very idiosyncratic line which can be very dramatic. Drawing can also be done with a brush and ink or paint.

The Ground

What paper should be used?

Size:

The paper on which the drawing is done needs to be considered carefully. The size is an important factor and is often determined by the choice of medium. Charcoal requires a large piece of paper (A2, A3) as it is a medium which gives rise to large marks, while a line drawing with biro may need a small piece of paper (A4).

Colour:

Other factors to consider will be the colour of the paper, for instance a chalk and charcoal drawing will work better on medium grey or buff paper than on white. Pastels will usually work well on dull softly coloured brushwork paper where the colour will be shown clearly. A drawing using a pen or pencil will normally be best on white paper.

Texture:

The texture of the paper is an important factor. Pencil drawings are normally best on cartridge paper where the slight texture and white colour enables the softest of marks to be made and seen well. Often schools will be given printers' offcuts of paper or card. These may come from a printer as offcuts. They may well be very smooth which makes it difficult to draw on with a medium such as charcoal, crayon or pastel which need quite a roughish, textured surface. However, smooth card works very well with ink based pens, felt tips or biro where the smooth surface allows the lines to be drawn easily across the surface leaving a clear crisp edge.

The Techniques

What techniques or marks are appropriate?

The teacher should reflect on the way that the medium could be used. What sort of marks need to be rehearsed and used by pupils. This will depend on what is to be drawn and what medium is being used. Lines will need to be explored and practised for their expressive qualities. A tentative hesitant broken line may be best for the edge of a cabbage leaf or bark, while a smooth flowing line will be appropriate for long hair or grasses.

Lines can be long, short, smooth, jagged, jerky, angular, rhythmic, waving, bent, straight, curved, scribbled. Texture and tone will also require different marking making techniques. A soft tonal drawing will require the paper to be gently stroked with a soft pencil or vigorously rubbed with charcoal and chalk.

In any one drawing marks might stand for outlines, textures or tones each may need a different technique.

2 Talking

The teacher must consider how they will help pupils see the subtleties of form, colour, texture and reflect on the quality of the materials they are using.

“The importance of talk: describing, questioning, analysing, cannot be overemphasised. It is through talking, as much as through looking, that children develop clarity and sensitivity.”

Robert Clement⁶

Questioning will be a key feature in teaching drawing, just as it is in other areas. Questions will draw attention to particular aspects such as the formal elements of tone, shape, colour, texture. It will also focus attention on the quality of the materials and the marks that they make. Questioning will draw upon, and reinforce, pupils knowledge of how materials work and interact with each other.

Tone, Texture, Line, Shape?

Where is the darkest part? Why is it the darkest part? Where is the light coming from?

Where is the smoothest, roughest part? How can you show this? What will you use?

Is this colour lighter or darker in tone than this colour?

How can you show this texture? Show me?

What sort of line would you use to show this: outline, texture, pattern.

How will you place this on the paper? Do you have to include everything or could you choose a small part only?

Drawing Materials and Techniques?

If you are using chalk and charcoal what paper will you use? Why? How big will it be? Why?

This paper is very smooth what should we use to draw with? Why? Why couldn't you use...?

What will you use to draw this with? Why? What else would also be successful?

Looking?

Which is longer the eye, the nose, the mouth?

Where is it widest, shortest, longest, thinnest?

What word can you use to describe this colour, and this, and this?

How could you describe this line, and this, and this?

How would you describe the main shapes in this?

What sort of drawing will this be (lively, sad, gentle, soft, mechanical, twisty, rough, delicate)?

Examples

Teachers will find it helpful to support talk about drawing by having a variety of examples of different types of drawing available to illustrate points, or to show alternative approaches. It is a good idea to have a variety of examples which show different approaches. This prevents the tendency to present a single approved style of drawing.

A good source of examples will be from children's' illustrated story books. These will often show techniques which are accessible to children. Other sources will be magazines, and advertising materials. Care should

be taken to ensure that examples do not present children with completely unobtainable and inaccessible practices. (Working in the style of Rembrandt may not be appropriate)

3 The Subject

Are the objects interesting to the pupils?

Try to choose objects that are interesting or unusual. Sometimes changing the context adds interest. An old car tyre looks normal in a garage but strange in a classroom. When drawing figures a hat or costume will make the figure more interesting. Strange combinations (toy car + apple) can also help so can carefully considered combinations of colours, shapes, scales and textures (all reds, triangles or textures).

It is sometimes good to choose objects that are naturally interesting to children of this age range – sweets for all ages, trainers for older children, toys for younger children etc. Flowers are usually interesting.

Are they too complex or too simple for the observational and technical skills of the pupils?

Sometimes objects are so simple and subtle that it is hard to draw anything other than an outline, such as an egg or orange. They will need strong side lighting to give clear shadows if they are to be a good subject for drawing. Increasingly very young children are being seen to draw very complex objects such as bicycles. The complexity of the subject may also be related to the time available for the drawing.

Do the objects lend themselves to the formal elements being considered?

It is often helpful in a drawing to concentrate on one or two formal elements at any one time. Try to match the object and the formal element. A cut cabbage is good for line, a cut pepper is good for pattern and colour, toys are good for shape, fur and textiles may be good for texture, a stone in strong cross light may be good for tone. These decisions impact upon the choice of medium and paper.

Feelings and expression?

Figures are undoubtedly difficult but have considerable potential for expressive work. Initial observational work can lead to more expressive drawing as figures are distorted and materials are used to emphasis feelings and mood. Figures and portraits, like landscapes are images that children can return to again and again throughout their school career (unlike red peppers).

Drawings of insects are useful as a prelude to imaginative drawings about monsters. This paper is primarily about drawing from first hand experience but this will often provide a gateway and a repertoire of techniques for more individual inventive drawing and planning.

Presenting Subject Matter

How are the objects presented?

Think about the background. It may be helpful to use a cloth or paper. Think about the colour and tone of this should it blend or contrast with the objects in the foreground? Also think about the light source. How does the light hit the objects and what does this look like from where the children are sitting? It is best to have a single light source from the side. This can be done by placing the objects next to the window rather than in the centre of the room. How close to the objects should the children be? If they are too close every time they move their head they will see a new view.

Teachers will often create interest and enthusiasm by presenting the subject matter for drawing with a sense of drama. Lighting, backcloths, changes of seating all add to the sense of occasion.

How can we ensure pupils see?

When drawing it is important to have a clear view of the objects. Try to have the objects directly in front of the pupils so they do not have to turn their heads.

It is helpful to cut a set of simple viewfinders from card or black paper. These will help the children focus on what is to be drawn and will block out the rest of the scene. As children get older viewfinders can help when arranging the objects in a composition on the paper.

It will be helpful to have a set of drawing boards in the school so pupils can draw easily by moving their chairs, outside or in the hall. Sheets of plywood slightly larger than A2 will do.

Remember to check their view taking account of the object, background and lighting.

Differentiation and Progression

Differentiation and progression can be achieved by:

- increasing the range and scope of experiences using drawing:
 - recording, investigating, analysing (*eg different viewpoints*)
 - more complex subject matter, objects, groups and environments
 - extending the scope of drawing taking it beyond the immediate task: developing ideas further; using techniques in other contexts. Drawing from imagination. Drawing to develop ideas. Draw for different purposes.
- increasing the depth of knowledge and understanding:
 - of elements such as tone, colour, line etc.
 - of materials and processes and how they are used by other artists
- increasing the expectations of quality of the drawing:
 - confident, sensitive, skilful use of materials,
 - quality of expression, perception,
 - craftsmanship,

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¹ Lesley Perry in 'Drawing Research and Development', Ed. David Thistlewood, Pub. Longman

² Maurice Rubens & Mary Newland, 'A Tool for Learning', 1989, Pub. Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation

³ Erich Bauer in 'A Tool for Learning' above

⁴ David Hockney in Jeffery Camp, 'Draw', 1984

⁵ Robert Clement in 'Drawing Research and Development', Ed. David Thistlewood, Pub. Longman

⁶ Robert Clement in 'Drawing Research and Development', Ed. David Thistlewood, Pub. Longman