



# Teaching Young Children to Draw

IMAGINATIVE APPROACHES  
TO REPRESENTATIONAL  
DRAWING

Grant Cooke  
Deirdre Griffin  
Maureen Cox

 Falmer Press

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# Acknowledgements

**Figure 1.1**±Mogul drawing, reproduced with permission of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

**Figure 1.2**±Japanese print, reproduced with permission of the British Museum, London.

**Figure 1.4**±Rosemary Hill provided the Australian Aboriginal children's drawings. We also acknowledge the Warlpiri Media Association and thank the people of Yuendumu, Central Australia.

**Illustration on page 31**±Grant Cooke drew the comic strip and this was first published in Cox, M.V., Cooke, G. and Griffin, D. (1995) Teaching Children to Draw in the Infants' School, *Journal of Art and Design Education*, 14, 153–163.

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# Why Teach Children to Draw?

## 1

### • Why Teach Children to Draw?

Children operate as ‘artists’ from a very early age using different materials for personal expression and as a way of exploring and making sense of the world in which they are growing up. This process of development needs to be supported by parents and teachers in a variety of different ways, ranging from encouraging free and imaginative expression to exploring the work of other artists and putting children in touch with conventions which will enable them to develop their confidence and skills in visual thinking, problem solving and drawing as a means of communication. For, as Norman Freeman (1980) emphasizes, ‘children are not simply creatures expressing their essence through drawing, they are also novices who are learning how to draw’. This book is designed to provide teachers with an easily accessible and enjoyable approach to supporting children in their engagement with the drawing process.

Drawing as a way of making marks and controlling space on a flat surface is fundamental to all visual communication, whether for practical or artistic purposes. It can be the foundation for more imaginative picture making in art education, and has further importance as a medium in which children can record their observations in other areas of the curriculum and through which they can come to understand relationships and concepts important in a number of different subjects. A major problem for the teacher, and especially the non-specialist teacher, is how to go about the teaching of drawing. Since the subject has not attracted the same attention as some other aspects of the curriculum—such as reading, writing and number work—many teachers will have little or no training in how to teach drawing. Although most teachers provide opportunities for children to draw—as an art activity or as part of other project work—they have not necessarily considered the activity **in its own right** and how it might best be taught. It’s not surprising then that many teachers feel at a loss and that over 60 per cent, according to a recent survey (Clement, 1994), feel the need for further inservice training if they are to teach the art curriculum. The lessons



outlined in the main section of this book were originally devised as part of a professional development programme designed to introduce teachers working with infants to non-threatening ways of approaching the teaching of drawing.

Call for better provision and advice for art education in the UK was made in the early 1980s by, among others, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (1982) and HM Inspectorate (DES, 1983). Even in 1990, however, HM Inspectorate was still lamenting the lack of any coherent and informed practice in primary schools. Introduction of the National Curriculum led to the teaching of art being taken more seriously. The National Curriculum Art Working Group was set up to identify and advise on the objectives of the teaching of art as a foundation subject for pupils between the ages of 5 to 14 years. Their report (DES, 1991) identified drawing as an activity central to all work in art and design and highlighted the importance of drawing from observation. Subsequently the National Curriculum for Art in England (DFE, 1995) has included a number of statements concerning the need for recording observations and an emphasis on drawing. For example, at Key Stage 1 (age 5–7 years) pupils should be taught to ‘record what has been experienced, observed and imagined’ and ‘experiment with tools and techniques for drawing, etc.’ (p.3). At Key Stage 2 (age 7–11 years) they should be taught to ‘develop skills for recording from direct experience and imagination, and select and record from first-hand observation’, ‘record observations and ideas, and collect visual evidence and information, using a sketchbook’ and ‘experiment with and develop control of tools and techniques for drawing, etc.’ (p.4).

Drawing can be used in many different ways, and drawing from an observed model is just one strand of art education. However, it is important because it introduces children to a convention of **representational image making** which involves careful looking, critical thinking and decision making in relation to drawing. It is a form of visual communication which is relatively easy to ‘read’, and has been used and understood by many different cultures at different times throughout history.

### Representational Drawing

Representational modes of image making are often seen as essentially a Western art convention, associated with high points of achievement like the Renaissance, when clear visualization of three dimensional space became possible through the development of perspective. However, representational image making is also an important convention in World Art. Think of the correspondence with reality that one finds in Mogul miniatures and traditional Japanese prints, or in minor figures in ancient Egyptian wall paintings. There is a similar correspondence with reality in the huge hand-painted cinema hoardings in present day Madras and images in advertising which cross cultural boundaries. In these examples the artists have used different drawing techniques or ‘depth clues’ to suggest the spatial relationships between people and objects. They vary from what theorists would call ‘single point of view perspective’ and ‘foreshortening’ to flatter and more decorative indications of space using overlapping planes or ‘parallel oblique perspective’. But what they have in common is a recognizable connection between what we see in the picture and what we know from looking at the world around us.

In this Mogul miniature (figure 1.1) we can see elements of portraiture—the depiction of a particular, individual elephant. From this drawing we know the general shape of the animal and, because of the relative proportions of the mahout on its back, have some idea of its size. The sensitive rendition of the surface gives us some knowledge of the folds and textures of the elephant’s skin. We also gain fairly detailed information about the ceremonial trappings worn by the animal through the decorative detail of the cloth on its back, and the ornate harness with its tassels and bells which holds the regalia in place. We know and recognize these things because there is a correspondence between the drawn image and observed reality.

The Japanese print of three women picking mulberry leaves to feed silkworms (figure 1.2) has a flatter more decorative quality than we would find in European art of the same period. The artist has used parallel oblique perspective which, unlike the Western form of

perspective developed in the Renaissance, does not have receding lines converging on a single vanishing point. However, we have little difficulty in deciphering much of what is happening in this frozen moment of communication between the two women who are reaching up and grasping branches of the mulberry tree and the woman passing below with two full baskets of leaves balanced across her right shoulder. As well as being aesthetically satisfying, the image conveys a great deal of recognizable information, even when viewed from the perspective of a different time and culture.

The contemporary artists from the South of India who produced this hand-painted advertisement (figure 1.3) are using representational imagery in a similar way to convey key aspects of the film’s narrative—a dancer who continues her career despite having her leg amputated.

Of course there are vast differences between all these examples, and great differences in the traditions and types of training that lie behind the work. Over the centuries there has always been a degree of cross fertilization between different cultures, and the Mogul artist who drew the Imperial Elephant may well have been influenced by European artefacts in the same way that Western painters were at a later date influenced by the work of Japanese print makers. The hoarding painters in Madras are open to not only Indian and Western traditions of painting, but the influences of Indian and Western cinema, photography, and all that has become available world wide through new technologies.