

Drawing + Talk = Powerful insights for teachers of writing¹

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This chapter explores the 'marks' that children make in order to revisit the important relationship between drawing and emergent writing. It presents a case study of one child's drawings and the surrounding talk in order to offer insights for teachers of writing.

Setting the context

Educational research has long recognised young children's experiences as providing foundational literacy knowledge and skills. Research has predominately focused on the importance of early reading activities, and less investigation has occurred about young children's early writing experiences (Clay, 2001; Coates & Coates, 2006; Mayer, 2007). As talking, listening, reading and writing skills are interrelated and develop simultaneously, it is important to understand the development of all domains of language (Clay, 2001; Dyson, 1990).

Children's drawings, which are a form of writing, are an important means for communication and representation. They serve as cultural tools used to represent information and to share moods and sentiments (Levin & Bus, 2003). Children see themselves as writers from a very young age. Graves (1981) said, if children '...can hold a crayon, marker, pencil or some other kind of writing instrument ... they can produce some form of written expression' (p. 99). Children do spontaneously use drawing-like devices, demonstrating the importance of drawing as a representational-communicative system for young children (Clark & Kraiger, 2007; Graves, 1981; Levin & Bus, 2003; Sidelnick & Svoboda, 2000). Mackenzie (2011) positions drawing as play, a substantive mental activity, a socially meaningful activity and a constructive process of thinking in action. From an early age, children develop a 'symbolic repertoire', of which print is only one part (Genishi & Dyson, 2009, p. 83).

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We know the importance of drawing and its relationship to the development of fine motor skills necessary for writing. For example, Kellogg's (1970) seminal 'twenty basic scribbles' presents a powerful framework for the analysis of children's drawings as characteristics, frequencies and placement of marks on the page are examined, giving insight into emergent writing behaviours. Children's intrinsic desire to draw provides the motivation and encourages practice of the hand-eye coordination and fine motor control necessary for the development of motor skills that enable the production of print (Bromley, 2007). Children move from making these marks to learning to write. Genishi and Dyson (2009) observe that learning to write is often presented as a linear progression where a child moves from scribbles to invented spellings and eventually to readable and more complex text. We know this to be simplistic and unrepresentative of what we understand about the writing process as described by R.D. Walshe in Chapter 2 of this book.

There has been considerable focus in past decades on the relationship between emergent writing and drawing (for example, Calkins, 1986; Dyson, 1988, 1990, 2001; Genishi & Dyson, 2009; Graves, 1981; Mackenzie, 2011). For young children, the opportunity to draw is purposeful (Jalongo, 2007) with their drawings often representative of the meanings they make through deliberate efforts to capture key information (Dyson, 2001). Graves (1981) spoke of children's ability and the care and attention to detail they give to the illustrations they create. His early work suggests children are intrinsically motivated to draw and are inspired to continue to draw by the enjoyment of producing marks that are appealing to look at (Graves, 1983) and often attract approval from others. Children's development in drawing is innate and universal across all cultures, races and socio economic backgrounds.

However, while it is important to draw on key findings from past research between emergent writing and drawing, researchers such as Anne Haas Dyson remind educators there is still much to learn. In particular, Dyson (2001) argues for the ongoing examination of the 'act of composing' that children engage in as they draw. Graves (1981) claimed, 'often when children draw, their pictures lead them to new content' (p. 47). Drawing provides a powerful language and literacy experience for young children through its rich and accessible avenue for expressing meaning (Clay, 2001) and to connect visual representations to experience (Dyson, 2001). The drawing, or 'marks', that children offer represent a visual story that draws on their own interests and experiences (Kim, 2011). Coates and Coates (2006) observe that children's drawings '...offer a freshness, boldness and sense of purpose' (p. 221). Thus the very act of drawing enables children to hold ideas in their minds as they create a visual representation (Clay, 2001). With the inclusion of visual and aural literacies, the path to literacy is widened as

children link language to their drawings while they simultaneously learn how to express themselves in writing. Vygotsky (1978) argued that children's drawings encapsulate the narrative impulses through their capturing of story through the talk that surrounds and supplements drawing experiences.

Given these understandings, we too believe there is much to explore. An important relationship exists between drawing and the oral narrative that is composed alongside. Available literature on this relationship is minimal and it seems much of the promotion of talk related to drawing is through providing opportunities for the child to talk *about* their picture once the drawing is complete (Einarsdottir, Dockett & Perry, 2009; Golomb, 1974). There is some literature that investigates the power of peer talk during writing (for example, Gentle, 1985; Shugar, 1988) with findings that indicate that these conversations contribute to the content of the writing/drawing. While Tassoni and Hooker (2000) suggest that children can become so engrossed in their writing there may be no need for talk, Ray (2010) emphasises the value in providing time for children to 'linger' with their writing/drawings as they intentionally compose with illustrations through the marks, colour and other media. Furthermore, Cox (2005) asserts that through drawing children 'purposefully bring shape and order to their experience' and through this process they actively define their reality (p. 124). Pahl and Rowsell (2010) emphasise the importance of sharing experiences to enable participation across spaces.

The purpose of this chapter therefore is to explore the 'marks' that children make to revisit the important relationships between drawing and emergent writing.

Examining the drawings² children create

The chapter explores samples of drawings done by one five-year-old child named Oliver (pseudonym). Oliver's writing samples were part of a large research project that collected and examined all drawings created by children between 4 and 5 years of age as they engaged with the drawing table in one community-based prior-to-school service (pre-school) context located in a metropolitan area of New South Wales. The children involved in the project were in transition to their first year of formal schooling (referred to as Kindergarten in New South Wales). The researchers collected the drawings used in this chapter during three visits to the pre-school.

Alongside the drawing table, a concurrent choice of activities was offered to the children, including playdough, construction toys, a reading corner and dress-up space. The children were

² By drawing we refer to any mark made by a participating child, on paper, at the drawing table in the pre-school.

able to choose the activities with which they engaged and freely roamed between activities. A child's size table with six chairs was located in the centre of the room, becoming a space designated for drawing. Art paper and marker pens were placed on the table during the three visits. The participating children were observed as they engaged in free choice spontaneous drawing at this table. Once at the drawing table, the children were not directed to draw nor were any instructions given. Rather, the first author sat amongst the children and encouraged them to talk while they were drawing. Talk at the table was captured through audio recording and field notes and copies of the drawing were made with each child's approval.

In the first instance, Kellogg's (1970) 'twenty basic scribbles' provided a framework for analysis of the characteristics, frequencies and placement of 'marks' on the page within each drawing. Analyses using this frame provide insight into a child's emerging control of writing conventions such as letter formation and position.

The second level of analysis considered the content of each drawing alongside the talk recorded as it was created. Here, the analysis considered the marks on the page in connection with the talk in terms of the process of planning, creating and sharing a story.

For the purposes of this chapter, three drawings and accompanying oral transcripts from Oliver are examined (see Table 1). Oliver was the only child to participate in activities at the writing table at all periods of observation.

Table 1: Oliver's construction of his family picture

Steps	Description of Steps involved in the drawing	Oral transcript as Oliver draws	Analysis of the 'marks' on the page
1	Oliver picked up a red marker. He rubs his hand across the page multiple times as he talks.	I'm going to draw my family. My family is very nice so they do lots of nice things for me. They do really good things and I really like them. And so they they do lots of nice things. I really like it. So yeah, I really like it. And so, I don't really want to move, so yeah! I want to stay at my home and be happy and do lots of good things.	
2	Oliver begins drawing his father to the left of the page. He starts with a circle for the head. Two eyes and a smile are added, followed by two vertical lines (neck) and a square torso. As he draws the torso, he doesn't take his	Some of the people in my family are bald and some have lots of hair. I really like my family. I like how they do nice things for me. Really, really, really good things. I've drawn dad.	Imperfect circles Curved lines Single vertical lines Single horizontal lines

	marker pen off the page and moves from left to right, top to bottom, right to left, bottom to top. Stick arms with fingers and stick legs are added.		
3	Oliver begins to draw his mother (to the right of his father, in the centre of the page). He starts with a circle for the head. Two eyes are added, followed by two vertical lines (neck) and a square torso. The two vertical lines were drawn first and these are then joined with the horizontal lines.	Now I've got to draw my mum. My mum is the nicest person in my family. My dad is the second nicest and my two brothers are the third nicest. My mum is so nice because she does really good things. Like if my pants have a hole in them she'll sew them up. She looks like ummm just my mum! Well I'm drawn dad and now I'm up to mum.	Imperfect circles Single vertical lines Single horizontal lines
4	Oliver adds a smile to his mother's face. Stick arms with fingers and stick legs are added. Strands of hair are added.	Daddy has the biggest smile so yeah. Mummy has a big smile too cause it's not fair otherwise. Some people in my family are bald and some aren't. That's not fair.	Curved lines Single horizontal lines Single vertical lines Multiple line overlaid
5	Oliver begins to draw his older brother to the right of his mother. Again, he starts with a circle for the head. Two eyes are added, followed by two vertical lines (neck) and a square torso. As he draws the torso, he doesn't take his marker pen off the page and moves from left to right, top to bottom, right to left, bottom to top	I really like my family. I like what they do and they like what I do. I'm drawing my brother now. So once when I wasn't even alive my biggest brother got lost in a shop. It wasn't really funny, it was sad. You can hear me doing my best drawing. The best drawing I can do.	Imperfect circles Single vertical lines Single horizontal lines
6	Oliver labels his brother's picture (as he spells it aloud). Oliver draws his younger brother following the same procedure for the head, neck and torso as he did for his older brother, just making everything smaller. He adds two dots for eyes, a semi-circle for a smile and lines for hair.	So yeah, I know how to spell my brother's name [spells it aloud]. I don't know how to spell my little brother's name. I need to learn that.	Imperfect circles Single vertical lines Single horizontal lines Single curved lines Roving open lines
7	Oliver labels his younger brother, mum and dad. He draws himself on the far left of the page (next to dad). He starts with a circle for the head. Two eyes and a smile are added, followed by two vertical lines and one horizontal line (neck) and a square torso. As he draws the torso, he doesn't take his	I've finished my picture. Oh wait, I forgot to draw me. Here I am next to my father. I'm drawing myself as a teenager even though I'm not. That's my dream. I wish I was a teenager so I could drive a car. I want to drive my brothers to places they want to go. And yeah, I'm really	Imperfect circles Single vertical lines Single horizontal lines Multiple horizontal lines overlaid

	marker pen off the page and moves from left to right, top to bottom, right to left, bottom to top. Stick arms with fingers and long stick legs are added. Oliver draws arrows from each of the name labels to the character in the drawing. He finishes his drawing by 'colouring' each of the legs with multiple horizontal lines.	really finished my story. I like my picture of my family.	
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Examining the drawings and talk from Oliver

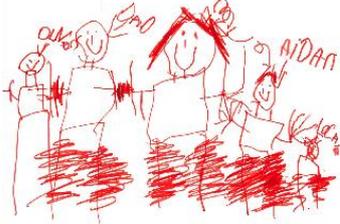
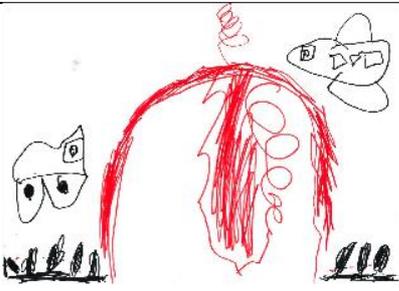
It was during the second period of observation, Oliver drew the picture of his family (see Figure 1). Table 1 presents the process involved in the physical construction of this drawing, the accompanying oral annotation, and an analysis of the 'marks' he made during its construction (using Kellogg, 1970). The oral annotation (included also in Figure 1) has been included again to show the talk that surrounded the set of 'marks' that Oliver made on the page.

The analysis of Oliver's drawing of his family reveals his ability to create seven of the different scribble types (Kellogg, 1970). The very similar routines he followed in his drawing of each family member demonstrate his ability to follow patterns. He demonstrated that he could make many marks that are important for the written alphabetic script that he will continue to learn. His ability to write twelve letters of the alphabet in a form that was readable provided further evidence of his emerging ability.

The analysis of Oliver's drawings to understand his emerging writing development provides important developmental insights into his physical writing abilities and informs the design of future learning opportunities related to fine motor control and writing conventions. However, the second level of analysis, which was focused on the planning, creation and sharing of story, reveals further elements for discussion. This analysis provided insight into the choices Oliver made as he planned and created the drawing, his sense of audience and the non-linear nature of the construction. These elements are organised into the following categories for discussion:

- Signalling the intention to create a story
- Choices related to the purpose of the story
- Choices related to physical construction
- Choices related to knowledge and emotion

Figure 1: Writing samples and oral transcripts during construction

Drawings and oral transcript during drawing by Oliver	
Text 1: Houses	
	<p>I'm going to draw a house. /// The magical house. // The door. The magical house. Once grew and grew and grew and the man who lived inside the house thought it was too big so he went away to find another house for sale. / Sadly, he couldn't find another house for sale. And then he went far away and found a house for sale. His next door neighbour was really nice and he lived happily ever after.// The man is inside the house so you can't see him. The house has four windows because that's nice. The builders who built the house chose that. / Maybe, I can't draw the whole next door neighbours house. Maybe I can draw the side of the neighbours house. Except that he has painted his house a different colour. There.</p> <p>They don't do things together. Nothing really. / The chimney. They're both making a fire because they're cold. Only one of them is making a fire. He has a chimney but he's not making one. He's decided he doesn't need to. But the other neighbour really needs to. Now I've got to draw the grass. /// I am careful. There. That's it. I like it. I want to show the teacher. (4 mins, 10 secs)</p>
Text 2: Family	
	<p>I'm going to draw my family. My family is very nice so they do lots of nice things for me. They do really good things and I really like them. And so they they do lots of nice things. I really like it. So yeah, I really like it. And so, I don't really want to move, so yeah! I want to stay at my home and be happy and do lots of good things. Some of the people in my family are bald and some have lots of hair. I really like my family. I like how they do nice things for me. Really, really, really good things. I've drawn dad. Now I've got to draw my mum. My mum is the nicest person in my family. My dad is the second nicest and my two brothers are the third nicest. My mum is so nice because she does really good things. Like if my pants have a hole in them she'll sew them up. She looks like ummm just my mum! Well I'm drawn dad and now I'm up to mum. // Daddy has the biggest smile so yeah. Mummy has a big smile too cause it's not fair otherwise. Some people in my family are bald and some aren't. That's not fair. I really like my family. I like what they do and they like what I do. I'm drawing my brother now. // So once when I wasn't even alive my biggest brother got lost in a shop. It wasn't really funny, it was sad. You can hear me doing my best drawing. The best drawing I can do. So yeah, I know how to spell my brother's name [spells it aloud]. I don't know how to spell my little brother's name. I need to learn that. I've finished my picture. Oh wait, I forgot to draw me. Here I am next to my father. I'm drawing myself as a teenager even though I'm not. That's my dream. I wish I was a teenager so I could drive a car. I want to drive my brothers to places they want to go. And yeah, I'm really really finished my story. I like my picture of my family. (6 mins, 46 secs)</p>
Text 3: Volcano	
	<p>So, once me and my family went to Hawaii. // We went on a ginormous aeroplane and it was really good. And then we went on lots of waterslides. / Thousands and thousands of them. //And then we went to see the volcano and we could see it glowing in the night. And it erupted. Well it almost did. Well it did actually. It did erupt. Yeah. There was lava going all around the sides. And I couldn't believe that I got to see a real volcano erupting. It was my first time seeing a volcano erupting. And there was lots and lots and lots of lava. And that's the end of my story. // I could smell the lave really really bad. And it really stinked. And that's the end of my story. // We did actually drive a car to get to the volcano. And we drove over lots of lots of black rocks. I will draw the black rocks. They are really hard to draw. Everything was on black rocks. There was black sand underneath the black rocks. // I went with the whole family. We drove around the volcano national park. We went on the aeroplane, it was very long. Every car has little black circles in the middle. That's the screws. That helps keeps the wheels on the car.// And that's the end of my story. Goodbye. (4 mins, 31 secs)</p>

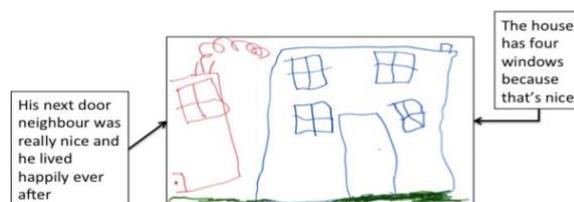
Signalling the intention to create a story

Oliver was observed to prepare for the creation of his story both physically and verbally. He selected a place at the drawing table, tools (paper and marker pen), the orientation of the page (landscape in each of the samples collected), and then declared his intention. For text 1, he stated, 'I'm going to draw a house' and then perhaps indicating a developing idea, he named the story as he began to construct its walls, stating, 'The magical house'. He similarly introduced text 2, announcing, 'I'm going to draw my family' and then spent some time 'touching' his page before he began. Text 3 reflects a different intention, however. He introduced this story with 'So'. This conversational story starter implies the sharing of a personal anecdote and hence adopts a more casual tone.

Choices related to the purpose of the story

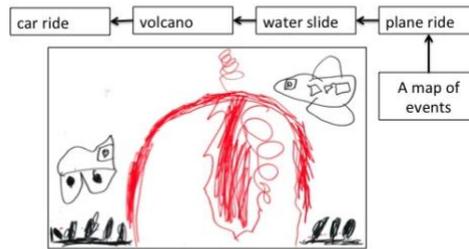
As Oliver's stories emerged through drawings and language, the purposes of his creations were revealed in his choices about the construction of the image and his accompanying oral text. In text 1 Oliver used the conventions of a quest narrative to relate a man's journey to find the perfect home. His language choices reflect knowledge of the genre in that the magical house 'grew and grew and grew' and, having fulfilled the quest, the man 'lived happily ever after'. Visually, the new and wonderful home is centred on his page, large and 'nice' (Figure 2).

Figure 2. The Magical House



Oliver's articulation while creating text 3 demonstrates awareness of a different purpose. In this text, he recounted a series of events using the temporal connective, 'and then' to chronologically outline a family holiday. This artwork operates more as a map for the audience than an illustration as Oliver drew and explained each step of the holiday (Figure 3).

Figure 3. A map of the family holiday



Once explained, Oliver informed his audience (or perhaps himself) that the recount was finished, ‘And that’s the end of my story. Goodbye.’

Choices related to physical construction

Oliver’s oral text also offers insight into the construction of his text and the way it developed. He shared the step-by-step process of recording his family members, ‘Well, I’ve drawed dad and now I’m up to mum’ (text 2). He observed in text 1 that the space on his page limited him to only being able to ‘draw the side of the neighbour’s house’ and that he would need to be ‘careful’ as he added ‘the grass’.

It appears there is a close relationship between the visual and verbal stories where one informs the other. For example, as Oliver related travelling around the national park in text 3, he is reminded of the bumpiness of the trip because of the volcanic rocks, and so these were added to the creation, ‘I will draw the black rocks. They are really hard to draw’ (Figure 4).

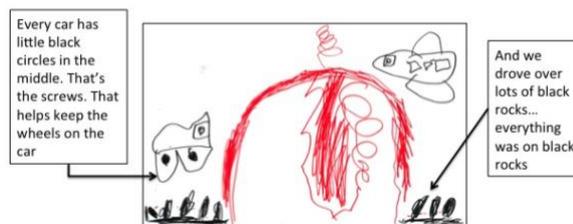


Figure 4. Black Rocks and Wheel Hubs

This addition to the story appeared to prompt Oliver to deviate from his ‘map’ of the family holiday as he shared a factual account of the mechanics of the wheels on a car and how to represent these through drawing.

Choices related to knowledge and emotion

Alongside insight into Oliver's knowledge about texts, their purpose and construction, his oral texts also reveal his knowledge about and emotional connections to the stories he creates. He demonstrates topic knowledge about volcanoes in text 3 through use of the terms 'lava' and 'erupted' and his observation that 'it stinked'. His topic knowledge in this personal recount extends to car hubs, observing as he drew, 'That's the screws. That helps keeps the wheels on the car' (Figure 4).

Oliver's commentary also reflects a depth of feeling through his language choices. He used 'really' (14 times), 'nice' (8 times) and 'like' (8 times) throughout his family story (text 2) to demonstrate high regard for his family members, 'they do really good things' and their high regard for him, 'I like how they do really nice things for me' (Figure 5)

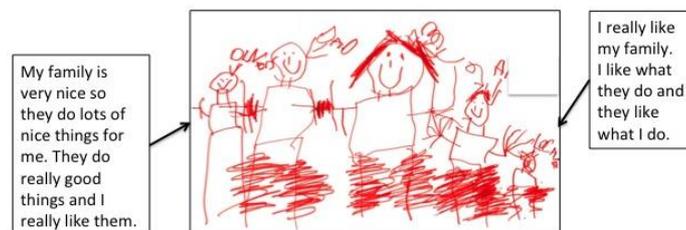


Figure 5. Family Portrait

Indeed, on this text, he explains that he is creating 'the best drawing I can do'.

Oliver demonstrates empathy for the man in the magical house (text 1), explaining, 'Sadly, he couldn't find another house....' Furthermore, he expresses appreciation for the opportunities available to him during the family holiday to Hawaii (text 3), 'I couldn't believe I got to see a real volcano...it was my first time'.

Discussion

Our examination of Oliver's drawing and accompanying oral text presents us with some powerful insights for teachers of writing.

Insight 1: Drawing and talk together tells us about the process of text creation

Drawing is a representational-communicative system for children (Levin & Bus, 2003; Sidelnick & Svoboda, 2000). When we bring together findings from our analysis using Kellogg's (1970) 'twenty basic scribbles' and those from analysis of the relationship between talk and drawing we see a more complete account of drawing as emergent writing. In isolation,

Oliver's drawings certainly provided considerable insight into his fine motor development, control of developing writing skills, understanding of the written language and a sense of the topic (Bromley, 2007; Kellogg, 1970). However, composing a text requires more than mastery only of letters and words. The invitation to talk *during* rather than following a drawing appears to reveal more of the constructive process of thinking in action (Mackenzie, 2011) which led Oliver to new content (Graves, 1981), offering powerful opportunities for understanding emergent writing.

Insight 2: Drawing with talk gives information about the ways texts are constructed for different purposes

Children's talk as they draw can reveal much about the intricacies of the topic to which they are responding. The oral texts that Oliver shared during the creation of his drawings presented us with much deeper understandings of the 'compositions' he was presenting. During the process of talking and drawing, Oliver demonstrated considerable knowledge about the demands of different texts in terms of structure and language choices. He was able to craft texts that engaged and informed through his presentation of meaningful composition. Furthermore, the opportunity to talk while creating revealed how Oliver built on, elaborated and clarified parts of the story, a further demonstration of the non-linearity of text construction (Graves, 1981; Ray, 2010).

Through talk children can 'design' their stories as they are reminded of details, events and interesting information that may be of use. In these designs we see a child's developing understanding of the creation of texts for different purposes as he made decisions about the topic and associated vocabulary. For Oliver, his drawings were not predetermined. He moved about the page refining and adding to his 'marks' to further enhance and clarify his message.

Insight 3: Drawing with talk gives information about what's important to children, their relationships and the connections between home, community and school

Children's drawings provide a snapshot into the topics, events and experiences of interest to them. In this research, the purpose and significance of each text was revealed not only in the creation of the image itself (Jalongo, 2007; Kim, 2011), but it was further elaborated through the accompanying oral text. The talk connected the drawing to places, times and reciprocal relationships enabling the story to become richer and more extended (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010). It was this elaboration that shed light on Oliver's sense of connection to community and to family as he talked about their role in his life and his in theirs. Children's drawings serve as powerful artifacts that can cross boundaries, and this was evident in Oliver's drawing and talk

as he shared his experiences, introduced significant others, and described his feelings and emotions about them.

Insight 4: Drawing with talk empowers children as tellers of stories

All children have stories to tell. Drawing provides the opportunity to better understand what children have to say as they linger over stories (Ray, 2010), experiment with ways of telling, and define their realities (Cox, 2005). We know young children can draw more than they can write. When children are given opportunity to talk alongside the process of drawing we obtain terrific insight into their ‘stories’ (Genishi & Dyson, 2009; Kervin, 2014). The symbolic repertoires (Genishi & Dyson, 2009) that emerge provide opportunities to help understand what children can do as creators of meaningful text (Graves, 1981) but also where they need to move next as emerging writers (Clay, 2001).

Drawing supports the generation of ideas to which children can then attach text. In this way, drawing acts as a memory aid. Drawings enable children to hold ideas in their minds while attempting to express themselves in written form (Clay, 2001). For emergent literacy, children need opportunities to speak, listen, read, write, and draw as they experiment with using symbolic representation. The role of drawing in the development of writing is often overlooked or under emphasised. Mackenzie (2011) encourages drawing and writing to be considered as a ‘unified system for making meaning’ (p. 322) arguing that the drawings children create are often more complex than their efforts with the written word.

Concluding Comment

The ‘marks’ that children make as they compose drawings are important. So too, as Oliver demonstrates, is the talk that surrounds these creations. While children’s drawings are composed of lines, circular motions and colour, the talk that surrounds these creations provides important information about the process they engage with and the topics, events and experiences that are important to them. Children are storytellers as they articulate their ideas and the details within a drawing creating a meaningful text. Children’s enthusiasm in this process presents a pathway to engaging them in sharing the stories they have to tell, through drawing, talk and increasingly, print.

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