

'Imaginative play and graphicacy: young children as powerful agents of their learning'

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Abstract

This study explores imaginative play and graphicacy (Vygotsky, 1978; Kress, 1997), acknowledging the centrality of the child's perspective. It shows how young children's sign-making through drawings, writing and their mathematical graphics allows them to explore a complex interplay of meanings in ways that are personally relevant to the child. This perspective rests on a postmodern view of the child as a 'co-constructor of knowledge, culture and identity', assuming 'that children are knowers of their worlds and that, therefore, their perspectives and understandings can provide valuable insights' (Janzen, 200: 291-2). It recognizes all children as capable and intelligent, providing an image of the child that changes in 'a pedagogy of listening' (Dahlberg et al, 2007: 102).

Methodology

The data was collected during the first phase of doctoral research. The aim of the research is to explore Vygotsky's theory 'that make-believe play, drawing and writing can be viewed as different moments in an essentially unified process' (1978: 116), and to trace *children's mathematical graphics* (Carruthers and Worthington, 2005, 2006) from their emergence in imaginative play. It seeks to uncover the socio-cultural and philosophical influences that contribute to the children's developing semiotic modes.

This naturalistic study is situated within an 'interpretative paradigm' that acknowledges the researcher's subjectivity (Ring, 2005). The qualitative data was gathered from 3-4 year-old children in two nursery settings, drawing on episodes of children's spontaneous, self-initiated play in which they freely chose to draw and make other visual representations (Worthington, 2009).

The findings highlight how children's meanings combine with culture to inform different symbol systems and shape their narratives, emphasizing an alternative construct of children as powerful agents of their own learning. This perspective challenges established perceptions of imaginative play and graphicacy in early childhood that can inform and enhance pedagogies of play and learning in England and internationally.

Key words: *imagination; graphicacy; post-modernism; pedagogy of listening*