

# **PART THREE: CHILDREN'S HOME AND SCHOOL ART EXPERIENCES, AND CONCLUSIONS**

## ***Introduction***

This third part of the thesis has four chapters. Chapter 10 focuses on Lee's home and school art experiences, Chapter 11 on Lilly and Sophie's experiences, and Chapter 12 on Jackson's experiences. In Chapter 13 I conclude this thesis by pulling together some insights gained from this research and presenting some recommendations and implications for pedagogical practice. Suggestions are also made for further research and an overview of the contributions, strengths and limitations of this research are discussed.

I will now preface these chapters by briefly introducing the children's schools and by describing the variety of art-related activities that the schools provided. I take care here to point out that these descriptors of art-related activities have been used as an organizing tool in order to assist the reader to recognize the types of art-related activities that the children engaged in. For me, these ways of considering art-related activities in the classrooms were not designed to be used as structuring device for analytical discussion within this thesis (although practitioners may find them useful when considering their own classroom practices). Instead, as will be seen in the following chapters, I have continued to explore the nature of these young children's art experience across their home and educational settings, and as such, have remained focused on the children's experiences of such activities, their perspectives on these and the ways in which they appeared to make connections between their thoughts and artistic actions (Dewey, 1934/2005). As such, Deweyan perspectives continued to inform my understanding of the children's art experiences in the second phase of the research and were relevant to how I made sense of the many art-related activities that the children were involved in.

## ***The schools***

The children started school in February, 2007. The boys attended public co-ed schools: Lee went to Blue Brick School (BBS) and Jackson attended Sandy Bay School (SBS). The girls, Lilly and Sophie, went to the same private girls' school: Champion Girls' College (CGC). Attending school brought many new experiences for the children. This included the wearing of school uniforms, having less at-home time, and having their activities structured within a timetabled schedule of lessons. Being at school was also physically demanding and, due to ill health, three of the children had time off school in the first term.

In terms of the physical classroom environments, all three kindergarten rooms were bright, inviting and purpose built. Each classroom was equipped with a standard whiteboard, blackboard, display easel and several computers. In addition, CGC had an interactive whiteboard. In the three classrooms, every child had their own desk, which was then grouped into sets of four to eight desks. Apart from linoleum near the sink and bench area, each classroom was fully carpeted and had a large clear area that was used as a 'mat' area. The children often sat in the mat area for initial instruction and for group activities, while art-related activities usually took place at the children's desks. In each of the schools, the children's art and other schoolwork was displayed on classroom walls and hung from wires that ran the length of their rooms. Children's artworks were also displayed in more public spaces such as reception areas, corridors and assembly halls. All three rooms were visually stimulating and it was obvious that the teachers expended time, thought and effort into displaying children's work in a meaningful and visually appealing way.

## ***Art-related activities in schools***

According to a guide for parents (Board of Studies NSW, 2008), English and Mathematics made up 50% of primary school programmes and creative arts occupied about 6-10% of the school timetable. That amounted to 1.5 to 2.5 hours per week dedicated to art, music, dance or drama, and each classroom in this research had some scheduled art lessons. It also soon became apparent to me that every day the children were engaged in a variety of classroom activities that required them to employ some art skills. Moreover, the children often talked about these art-related activities in a manner that suggested that they thought of these activities as being relevant to our joint interest in their art experiences. Therefore, in order to acknowledge and make sense of each

child's perspectives on these various art-related activities I observed the ways in which the children responded to these activities, I listened to the comments that they made about these (or, just as importantly, did not make), and I was cognisant of links between these school-based activities and each child's wider home and previous preschool experiences.

My Deweyan perspectives on art as experience also prompted me to make sense of the children's involvement in these activities in terms of their ability to make connection between their active outgoing energy of doing and making and their ingoing energy of perception, appreciation and enjoyment (Dewey, 1934/2005). Specifically, as I observed and interacted with the children I realised that I was conscious of the degree to which the children were personally active and perceptive about the art experience (as opposed to responding to imposed external requirements to act or interpret in specified ways). Further, I considered the extent to which I regarded their actions and perceptions to be a form of artistic expression<sup>18</sup> (as opposed to merely using art skills to communicate in another form of expression – such as mathematically). I was also conscious of social dynamics and who had control over the nature and direction of the activity. As a result of these considerations I came to regard the various art activities as art-like and art-type activities, art-and-craft and art education activities, art-as-communication and art-as-exploration. These categories were not mutually exclusive and I arrived at them from my vantage point as an art educator and researcher. Moreover, it was my impression that the children were less aware of these distinctions than I was.

Before discussing these kinds of art-related activities more fully I will point out that I have, in general, referred to these various kinds as art *activities* rather than art *experiences*. As previously discussed, in a Deweyan notion of art experience the relationship between action and perception 'is so close that it controls simultaneously both the doing and the perception...Hence the expression is emotional and guided by purpose' (Dewey, 1934/2005, pp. 51-52). Art experience also involves a sense of completeness and fulfilment that is part of that experience. As will become clearer in the following chapters, the extent to which a child had an 'art experience' while engaged in these activities depended on the child's personal response to it, on the conditions of the activity (including physical, temporal and human resources) and on the nature of the

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18 Dewey (1934/2005) pointed out that artistic expression was not simply an emotional outburst, but the channelling and transforming of self, emotion and material through art, in what is commonly referred to as inspiration. (See page 51-53 of this thesis for a fuller discussion on Deweyan notions of artistic expression).

activity. I need to also point out that my understanding of how children experienced art was limited by the constraints placed on me in their classrooms in terms of my interactions with them, and their ability to self-initiate art activities or discussions with me.

In the following three chapters I will share the children’s home and school experiences. However, before doing so I will briefly describe the terms I have used to discuss some of the art-related activities that I observed in the children's classrooms.

### **Art-like activities**

Those art activities that were undertaken in the services of other domains of learning, with little regard to artistic or aesthetic development, I have referred to as art-like activities. In art-like activities the children had little control over the subject-matter of their artwork or the manner in which the work was produced. These activities, while relying on the application of some art skills and materials, were undertaken in the services of other non-art domains of learning and success criteria were based around those learning areas. From a Deweyan perspective, these prescribed activities provided the children with little scope to unite their inner thoughts and esthetic perceptions with their outer artistic actions (Dewey, 1934/2005). Furthermore, when considering Dewey’s (1934/2005) statements that ‘art expresses, it does not state’ and that ‘the work of esthetic art satisfies many ends, none of which is laid down in advance’ (p. 140) I could see that these art-like activities held little possibility of becoming fuller artistic-esthetic experiences for the children.



Figure 67. Art-like activities in schools.

Some specific examples of art-like activities in the children's classrooms included drawing objects to correspond with a number or with words (Figure 67, left: Lee); collaging and colouring an ice-cream cone shape when studying the letter 'i'; adding textures to an outline of a lighthouse after a focus on a book about a lighthouse keeper (Figure 67, centre: Lilly and Sophie); and the use of pastel, coloured glue, and crepe paper to decorate 'imaginary insects' and 'ice-creams' (Figure 67, right: Jackson).

### ***Art-type activities***

Those art activities that were linked clearly to other domains of learning but also had some teaching points related to understanding and developing artistic skills I thought of as art-type activities. In art-type activities the children had little control over the subject-matter of the artwork but more control over the manner in which the work was produced. Alternatively, the children had limited control over how the work was produced, but the teacher gave some specific focus to helping the children to develop their artistic skills. In these respects, from a Deweyan perspective, there was greater scope for the children to make links between their perceptions of artistic qualities of their own work and the actions they took to produce aesthetically pleasing artworks and experiences (Dewey, 1934/2005).

Also, in art-type activities, while success criteria were usually based around the ability to show learning in a non-art domain, an ability to effectively use art skills was also recognized. As such, there was a stronger link between the children's artistic intentions and the resulting outcomes in art-type activities than there were in art-like activities. However, as the subject-matter of the work was often pre-determined these art-type activities provided limited opportunities for the children to explore personal interests or big ideas.



**Figure 68. Art-type activities.**

Some specific examples of art-type activities that I observed in the children's classrooms were associated with creating 'm' artworks that were well-developed and employed a variety of media and individual styles (Figure 68, left: Jackson); a mathematics focus on triangles where patterns and designs were also considered (Figure 68, centre: Lilly and Sophie) and an exploration of dots and lines (Figure 68, right: Lilly).

### ***Art-and-craft activities***

In each of the classrooms the children also engaged in activities that the teachers referred to as art-and-craft. I noticed that these types of activities were usually undertaken in the 'creative arts' part of the timetable and, in general, they had predetermined outcomes that were linked with making something special for specific events, festivals or celebrations. Art-and-craft sessions usually began with a teacher demonstrating the making processes and the children then used a variety of art materials that were provided especially for such sessions.



**Figure 69. Art-and-craft activities.**

Examples of art-and-craft activities, which I observed, included the children constructing Easter baskets (Figure 69, top: Jackson and Lilly), making orange leis for Harmony Day<sup>19</sup> (Figure 69, bottom left: Lee) and creating Easter hats (Figure 69, bottom right: Sophie). To varying degrees, each of the four children enjoyed making these artifacts, which in turn provided them with focal points for cultural interactions; such as joining in an Easter parade. I noticed that, despite the pre-determined outcomes, the teachers were supportive of the children's individual efforts, encouraged them to apply their art skills to generate some level of individuality and created positive environments in which the children's emotional well-being was considered. Indeed, from my perspective it would have seemed lacking if events such as Easter, Christmas or Mother's Day came and went without these young children 'making something special' (Dissanayake, 1992)<sup>20</sup> through art. From a Deweyan perspective, I could also see that it was the degree to which each child experienced such art-and-craft activities as personally relevant and emotionally, physically and intellectually engaging events that, on some occasions, elevated such sessions (and their outcomes) from mere 'busy' activities and 'pretty' objects to deeper artistic-esthetic experiences and artworks (Dewey, 1934/2005).

### ***Art education***

Within the classroom timetables there were also provisions for specific lessons that were undertaken in the realm of 'art education'. In these lessons, an art focus dominated the 'feel' and the goal of an art lesson. Specifically, visual art was one aspect of the 'key learning area' of the 'creative arts' in the NSW DET (2006a) curriculum document and, according to the NSW DET curriculum planning framework (2006b), at kindergarten level a child:

Makes simple pictures and other kinds of artworks about things and experiences;  
Experiments with a range of media in selected forms; Recognises some of the qualities of different artworks and begins to realise that artists make artworks;  
Communicates their ideas about pictures and other kinds of artworks. (p. 1)

The form that the art lessons took varied across the three classrooms and, as will become apparent in the following chapters, the teachers' own artistic skills and

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19 Harmony Day celebrated and promoted a tolerant and culturally diverse Australian society.

20 In Ellen Dissanayake's (1992) ethological perspective she regarded that 'it is not the art...but the making special that has been evolutionarily or socially and culturally important' (p. 56, original emphasis). In this perspective, the children's engagement in such art-and-craft activities was an important aspect of human behaviour and history.

confidence had some bearing on how teachers and pupils interacted during these art lessons and the way that the children’s artistic capabilities were supported or extended.

Some examples of art education lessons in the three schools included painting with water colours, (Figure 70, left: Lee), drawing and painting flowers with water-colour pencils (Figure 70, centre: Lilly and Sophie) and learning about blending pastels (Figure 70, right: Jackson).



Figure 70. Art education lessons.

In some art lessons the children were provided with art materials (such as paints or pastels) and encouraged to communicate about a specified theme, idea or personal experience – such as painting portraits of their mothers. While these can be thought of as using art as a means of communication I tended to differentiate between these art-orientated experiences and those more day-to-day practices of drawing a picture to go with a set topic. I thought of the latter, which I will now describe, as art-as-communication.

**Art-as-communication**

While art lessons, as discussed above, aimed to develop children’s artistic capabilities, there were many situations in which the children were asked to communicate graphically in non-art domains of learning without the benefit of having support for employing their artistic skills. I thought of these art-related activities as art-as-communication.



Figure 71. Art-as-communication activities.

Examples of art-as-communication activities included the children drawing a picture to go with their own stories (Figure 71, left: Lilly and Sophie), recalling or predicting events (Figure 71, centre: Lee), or communicating what is known about a set topic (Figure 71, right: Lilly and Sophie). The children usually worked on these types of art-related activities for fairly short time periods, had limited opportunities to set the theme of their work or to revisit their artworks and develop them further. As such, these conditions limited the potential of these art-related activities to become more fulfilling art experiences for the children. Also, as Dewey (1934/2005) pointed out, 'if the artist does not perfect a new vision in his process of doing, he acts mechanically and repeats some old model fixed like a blueprint in his mind' (p. 52). In the case of the four children in this research I noticed that they tended to call upon their existing repertoire of art skills and graphic symbols when involved in art-as-communication activities.

### ***Art-as-exploration***

Those artmaking projects in which the children used 'raw' materials, of their own choosing, to construct a flat or structural artwork, I thought of as art-as-exploration. With these sorts of art activities it was often the exploration of the materials, rather than predetermined ideas, that prompted art actions.



**Figure 72. Art-as-exploration activities.**

In the classrooms, art-as-exploration was often regarded as meaningful play, where the focus was on the problem-solving processes, rather than the resulting product. Some of these art-as-exploration activities involved the children in manipulating recycled materials to create three-dimensional constructions that they could keep (Figure 72, left: Lee). Other exploratory sessions involved the children in using materials that then had to be returned for future use and, as such, generated artworks of a temporary nature (Figure 72, centre: Jackson). I also observed the use of computer-generated art, when

the children explored the possibilities of the programme through experimentation (Figure 72, right: Lilly).

Prior to this research, I had not given some of these types of art-as-exploration activities a great deal of thought. However, the children's perspectives alerted me to the interest that these types of activities held for them, and Deweyan perspectives prompted me to acknowledge that, to some degree, such activities allowed them to unite their actions and perceptions in a cumulative manner (Dewey, 1934/2005). However, as there were few interactions between teachers and children during these types of art-as-exploration activities, opportunities for co-construction between children and adults was limited.

### ***Brief summary of art-related activities***

In this preface I have briefly introduced some of the art-related activities that I observed in the classrooms and the terms I will use when referring to them in the following three chapters. While these descriptors are fairly fluid it is my hope that they will go some of the way towards furnishing the reader with a sense of the basic landscape in which the children experienced art at school. The children's perspectives on their art experience will continue to drive the discussion in this third part of the thesis and it was the children's own comments and reactions, coupled with my understanding of Deweyan notions of art as experience (Dewey, 1934/2005), that led me more carefully consider not only those classroom activities that were designated as 'art lessons' but also the numerous ways in which children experienced art in their classrooms – for, as will be seen, it was all of these facets of art experience that contributed to the children's lived experiences of art in schools.

### ***Visiting schools and homes***

I will now share the children's art experiences in their homes and schools, beginning with a chapter on Lee. As discussed in Chapter 4, working in schools required me to meet some specific ethics requirements and once these were in place I visited each school once or twice a week in the first term of school, and for several consecutive days in the second term. I also met with each child in their home at least once a fortnight. Therefore, during the school terms, each child saw me regularly and photographs continued to be an important source of shared understanding between us. Some of these photographs have been placed as figures in the following chapters.

## 10. LEE

### Lee starts school

When Lee was aged 5 years 4 months old he started at Bluebrick Public School (BPS), which was one of Ashtown's largest public primary schools. He was in a kindergarten class with 16 others and his teacher, Sonia King, was the Assistant Principal. She had taught across several levels and had recently returned to teaching kindergarten children. I began the year with after-school visits, meeting with the teacher and arranging the necessary information and consent forms. Thereafter, in the first term, I visited Lee's classroom during school hours for 60-90 minute blocks once a week. In the second term I observed in Lee's classroom for four full school days in one week.

### Lee's art experiences

#### *Home art exhibition*

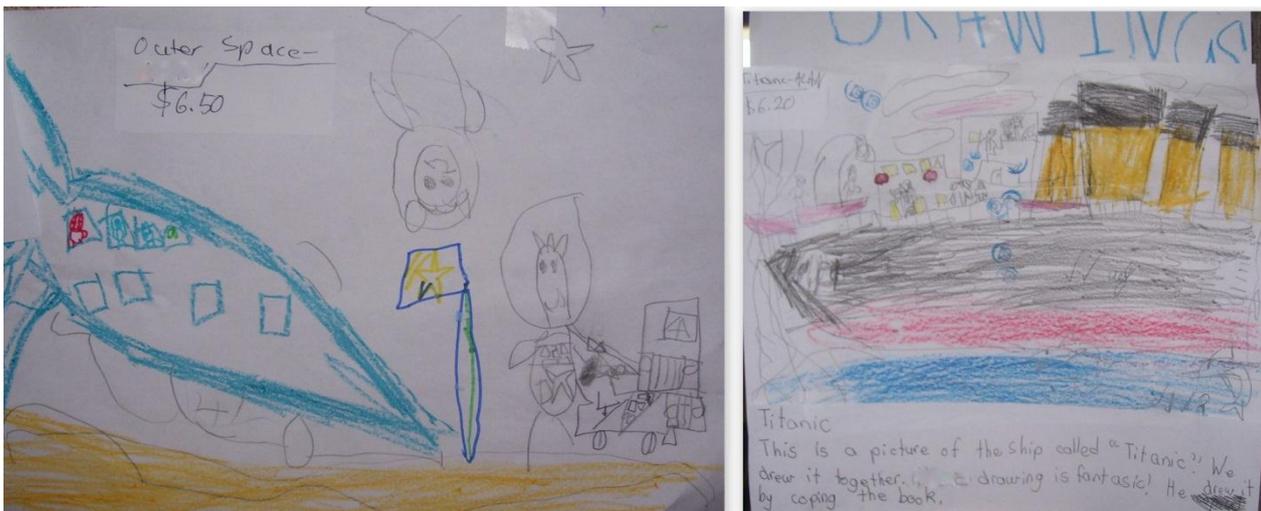


Figure 73. Lee's home-based art exhibition.

Two weeks into the school year, I arrived at Lee's home to be told that he had a surprise for me. Upon entering his home, I saw that he and Penny had created an

extensive art exhibition (Figure 73). They showed me around the exhibition and Penny provided most of the commentary. I photographed, and later counted the number of visible artworks – there were 84 visible artworks. In addition, some of the drawings had pictures on the back. Many of their artworks were quite complex, in terms of colour, design and topic, and to my astonishment they had produced all of the artworks in one day. Creating this exhibition would have demanded intense concentration, co-constructions and commitment on the part of the children, and a tolerance of mess and the use of family space on the part of their parents. The social interactions required to produce this exhibition would have also been complex.

An examination of the artworks revealed that there were themes and topics that the two children had worked on at the same time but in separate drawings. There were also some drawings that they had done together and still others that were unique to either child. They explained that they had taken turns at deciding on topics as drawings, and these had been based on their favourite themes, toys, and books.



**Figure 74. Astronauts and outer space; Titanic.**

There were also topics that had originated from Lee’s school-based work. For example, at school, Lee had coloured in and displayed a large cut-out astronaut as part of a study of words beginning with ‘A’. This character then appeared in one of his exhibited drawings (Figure 74, left). Penny and Lee also created some ‘real world’ features for their exhibition such as titles, artist’s signature and prices. Penny explained, “At the art museum they do that.”

Penny also wrote comments on some drawings, such as, “This is a picture of the ship called “Titanic.” We drew it together. Lee’s drawing is fantastic! He drew it by coping (sic) the book” (Figure 74, right). Her written commentaries suggested links between this

home-based experience, classroom experiences of having work displayed and their familiar play roles of pupil and teacher. They also suggested that, at the time of producing the artworks and exhibition, the children had a sense of audience.

The manner in which they excitedly showed me the exhibition suggested that I was their main target audience. Also, the siblings had clearly co-constructed knowledge and experienced this event as artists, critics and audience members. From a Vygotskian perspective I considered that being and having an audience were vital aspects of this art experience on several levels (Vygotsky, 1978). For example, at an intrapersonal level Lee was a critical audience to his own art; at an interpersonal level he and his sister united as a supportive and critical audience; and at a wider community level, I provided the viewing audience. For Lee, the social dynamics in the act of creating the showing the art exhibition also provided 'transformation of interaction into participation and communication' (Dewey, 1934/2005, p. 22). I also felt that the exhibition itself was an artistic-esthetic experience in that 'the material experienced' had run 'its course to fulfilment' (p. 36).

It was also apparent, when considering the influence of place and space on Lee's art experiences, that his home was conducive to his expanding art experience on a number of levels. For example, the children had art resources at the ready, they were encouraged to cooperate with one another and their parents valued the children's opinions, efforts and interests. Furthermore, his parents were supportive of their children's projects to the extent that they allowed the children to transform the home into an art gallery.

### ***Art-related activities at school***

While Lee's school orientation visits to BPS resulted in worksheet activities (see Figure 26, p. 131), when Lee actually started school he did relatively few activities that were pre-made or worksheet-based. Largely this was due to his teacher's belief that young children were capable of doing many things themselves, and benefited from being fully involved in the processes.



**Figure 75. Collage activities associated with numeracy and literacy.**

Collage, as an art medium, was frequently used in Lee's classroom. Early in the year, when Sonia was absent, the substitute teacher involved the children in an activity that had a mathematics focus (Board of Studies NSW, 2006), in which the children arranged and collaged pre-cut shapes to represent a house and tree. As seen in Figure 75 (left), although the finished collages were visually appealing, the learning activity focused on mathematics and was not intended as a means of artistic interpretation. Therefore, it was difficult to distinguish one child's work from another's. Upon her return Sonia integrated this maths activity with a literacy focus and the children created collage frogs (Figure 75, centre). The key difference, in terms of the children's experience of this activity, was that this time they cut their own shapes and produced frogs of various shapes and dimensions. Likewise, when the children had other collage-type activities Sonia expected them to cut the shapes and arrange these on the paper themselves (Figure 75, right).

While these activities were not part of the scheduled art lessons, when Sonia's belief in young children capabilities was enacted through pedagogical practice, Lee and the other children experienced some aspects that could be associated with having art experiences – such as drawing, problem-solving, planning, selecting and arranging. While I thought of these collage experiences as art-like activities, in that the the children had little control over the subject-matter of their artwork, because the children were so involved in the whole process this empowered Lee to draw on these skills in other situations. In terms of classroom routines, full child participation was more time consuming than providing pre-prepared activities, but the former provided more

challenges for the children. As was evident in some of Lee’s earlier art experiences, such as the Battleship computer, some degree of overcoming the ‘disruption and conflict’ (Dewey, 1934/2005, p. 14) that these challenges brought, was also an important aspect of his artistic growth and development. These challenges must have contributed to Lee’s sense of having an art experience, in that those activities in which he had the most autonomy were the ones he was most excited by and later able to describe most fully. For example, he offered no comments when viewing the photograph of the collaged house and tree (Figure 75, left) but when we viewed the frog collages (centre) he climbed on his chair and confidently sang three verses of “The little green frog living in the water.” Interestingly, when I asked Sonia if Lee was as confident when singing this song at school she said that she had not taught the class the song and she had sung it to them just once. Therefore, Lee’s home-based performance suggested that he was learning more than was readily apparent and that he was thematically linking his various learning experiences.



**Figure 76. Free-hand drawing activities.**

Sonia’s educational philosophies regarding the competency of children also permeated other learning experiences. For example, while the mathematics curriculum suggested a counting activity in which children matched computer generated images with the corresponding number, she involved the children more directly through a counting and drawing activity. This was a regular event and she modelled the process by drawing while counting (Figure 76, left). She also invited the children to suggest or draw their own matching items. Again, in Lee’s case he undertook these counting activities diligently at school (Figure 76, centre) and then reproduced numerous, more complex versions at home. Although Sonia did not specifically teach the children art skills, the simple act of regularly drawing in front of the children, provided them with a visual model for drawing. This was quite significant for Lee as he was receptive to models of drawing procedures, as evident from his response to children’s television programmes (for example, see Figures 23, 24, pp. 128-9).

There were other regular routines that involved some art skills. For example at the beginning of each month the children made a calendar (Figure 76, right). Most morning, after talking about the day, date and weather, each child drew a weather picture on their calendar. I observed when the children were making the new calendar page and Lee had completed his work before Sonia had finished describing the process. Later, Lee commented to me that the work was very easy. However, at the time he did not complain. At home he also drew his own versions of these calendars and he made books that matched numerals with objects.



Figure 77. Dan the flying man; Peter Rabbit.

There were many activities that involved Lee in free-hand drawing. For example, after the children had shared in reading a large book of *Dan the flying man* (Cowley & Dickeson, 2005), they drew a picture and had their stories transcribed. Lee participated in the required draw-and-write activity and then drew his own version of Dan (Figure 77, left). Comparing this freehand drawing with his earlier home-based drawings I could see that he was responding to the illustrations in the big book and extending his drawing repertoire. On other occasions, older children teamed up with kindergarten children, and helped them to write, such as in Lee's Peter Rabbit drawing (Figure 77, right). This particular drawing was quite simplistic as the words took on more importance. However, the interactions between Lee and an older child, I believed, would have been a positive experience for him, as he was most articulate when drawing and when interacting in a one-to-one situation.



**Figure 78. Literacy activities that involved drawing.**

In many of the teacher-initiated art-related activities the main focus was on written literacy rather than visual arts literacy. This was especially apparent when the children's drawings were partially obscured by the words (Figure 78). However, when the theme of the literacy activity was fairly open-ended, Lee often managed to integrate his own themes with the school theme – so in some respects these activities provided opportunity for art-as-communication. These drawings also revealed some of the complex thought that Lee applied to his drawings. For example, in his daytime and night-time drawings (Figure 78, right) he drew some complex images – such as the birds-eye view of people swimming in a pool and lying in a bed, interiors of a house and playground equipment. The satellite dish on the roof was a graphic indication of Lee's understanding of television signals, and his drawings of space rockets firing into the stars linked with some of his fantasy topics. The female character and the figure with ears were reminiscent of his princess and superheroes characters of several months earlier (see Figures 9 and 11, pp. 107 & 110). This entrée into his fantasy themes, and the partially coloured star, suggested that Lee would have continued working on this drawing if time had permitted.

Despite these glimpses of Lee's drawing themes I saw little other evidence of opportunities for him to expand on his big ideas within classroom practices. On two occasions, however, I observed Lee and some other children creating constructions with boxes and recycled materials during their free choice time (see Figure 72, p. 215). I noticed that, while some of the boys became engrossed in this exploration, there was no indication that this activity was valued as anything more than free play. Overall, then,

compared to Lee's preschool-based experiences, school allowed Lee to engage in a greater variety of art-like activities and to use his well-developed drawing skills. He also had some opportunities to expand his repertoire of art skills and to develop his verbal communication with peers. However, in terms of Deweyan perspective on art experience, Lee was involved in fewer artistic-esthetic experiences (Dewey, 1934/2005) of his own making.

### **Lee's art lesson**

In March I observed an art lesson. The children sat in the mat area, and Sonia showed them two books about Van Gogh (Bernard, 1992; Venezia, 1988). Although the children were not asked specific questions about the pictures they were encouraged to make comments about the images. There were also several posters of Van Gogh's paintings on display, which the teacher briefly directed the children's attention to. She told the children that they were also going to make paintings like Van Gogh did. At this point the children were invited to get the water colour paints, brushes and jars of water. They appeared to be accustomed to setting themselves up as within a couple of minutes they had appropriate art materials and waited at their tables while Sonia handed out paper.



**Figure 79. Lee's water colour paintings.**

When Lee had his art materials he swiped his wet brush across the cake of black paint and painted the outline of various shapes and objects (Figure 79). Although I did not see Sonia interact with the children as they painted, the paintings on display revealed that this was not the first time that the children had used water colour paints. Also, Lee's confident work habits suggested that he had benefited from previous instructions or demonstrations. Upon completion of one painting the children had free choice of inside

activities and Lee was the only child who created a second painting (Figure 79, right), which he painted for approximately 30 minutes.

Later, when I asked Sonia about her teaching plan, she provided me with a copy of a NSW DET (2006a) curriculum resource for Early Stage 1. Her art lesson had been based around one aspect of a cross-curriculum focus on the topic of 'Me'. The aim of the teaching plan was to 'Discuss form and texture of a famous artist' and to 'Recreate a famous portrait' (p. 1). However, as discussions with Lee later revealed, he was unaware of a link between the focus on Van Gogh and his painting experience. For example, when Lee and I later discussed his paintings he pointed to one painting (Figure 79, left) and said, "*So here's Harold giraffe<sup>21</sup>. Here's his bus. And you know the canteen? These are the stairs. And here's the grass.*" Looking at the second painting (Figure 79, right), he commented, "*Our classroom has a mouse, and have some tadpoles and have some fish.*"

Thus his own paintings were based on his experiences of school, as opposed to being in response to the images of Van Gogh or painting a portrait.

I wondered if he had made more of a link between the teaching focus and his actual painting activity during the lesson. I said, "I remember when you did this." I then prompted, "Can you remember what the teacher did just before you did this?"

Lee shrugged.

"Do you remember why you did this?"

Lee nodded.

"Can you tell Mum?"

Lee said, "*Because the teacher said you can do anything you want.*"

"And did she show you some books before you painted it?" I asked.

"*Umm...no,*"

As I had surmised from my observations, he had not related the books and posters to his painting experiences and the Van Gogh paintings had not held any personal significance for him. Furthermore, while this art activity had some meaning for Lee, in that it allowed him to explore his own visual themes, use appropriate art techniques, work within a social environment and have his artworks displayed, he had few meaningful interactions with other children, his teacher or relevant visual culture. Moreover, in terms of the art education focus, the lesson had largely missed the mark in

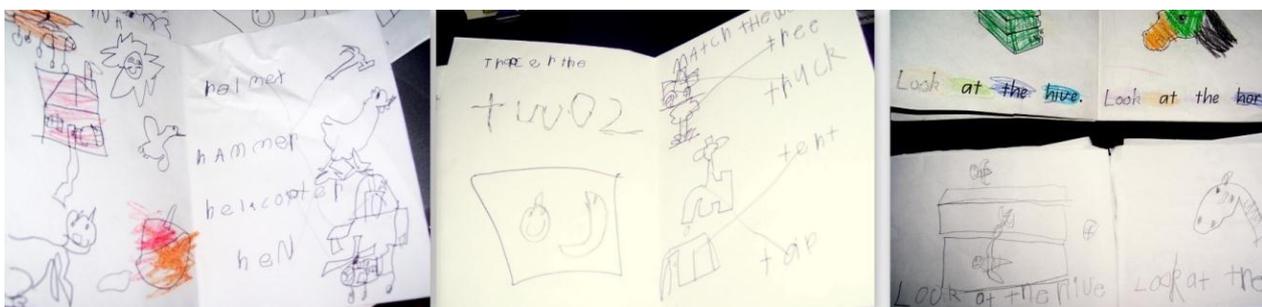
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<sup>21</sup> Harold is the giraffe mascot of the Life Education Trust: <http://www.lifeeducation.org.au>

terms of how Lee experienced it. Yet, interestingly, this art lesson on Van Gogh was one of the few classroom activities that could have coincided with one of Lee's big ideas - that of belonging. The painting session, where the children looked at Van Gogh's paintings, was part of a unit that focused the children on 'developing an understanding of who we are by exploring what we have in common with others and what is unique. How we express ourselves and communicate with others is part of our identity' (NSW DET, 2006a, p. 1). Lee's personal drawings were replete with images that explored this focus – yet the limited flow between his home and school experiences meant that these rich ideas were never tapped into.

### ***Flow between home and school art experiences***

Over the school phase of the research, it became clear to me that, while few of Lee's home-based or personal interests went into his school-based life, many of the activities that originated at school came into his home-based art experiences. For example, early in the year the kindergarten class undertook literacy exercises in which they matched words with pictures. When Lee brought such worksheets home he often re-created them using his own pictures and writing (Figure 80, left). He also replicated the graphic formats used in the school work, such as using a dash or dot outline as a guide for writing letters (Figure 80, centre).



**Figure 80. Lee recreated school books and worksheets.**

I noticed that there was a disparity between what Lee was expected to do at school and what he could do, and was expected to do, at home. For example, Jingjing explained to me that, in China, families and schools were 'very strict' about children doing homework and she was disappointed that Lee had one homework task per week that took him only 30 minutes to complete. It also appeared to me that Lee worked faster at home, and to a more complex level, than he did at school. This was perhaps because, at home he could get onto the next activity independently, while at school he often waited for others to complete the tasks and did not demand attention if he had finished. It had

occurred to me that, at school, if Lee had had ready access to a personal drawing book this would have allowed him to continue with his own work when he had finished set work. These drawings, in turn, may have provided his teacher with greater insights into his capabilities and interest.

Because Lee regularly engaged in home-based learning time, before his class was up to the letter H he recreated a 6-page booklet based on his sister's old kindergarten work on this letter (Figure 80, right). I noticed that this old school work was basically in a colouring-in format, which contrasted with the approach Lee's teacher took with her class. At home, Lee continued to confidently role play at being a school pupil and often Penny cast herself in the role of teacher by adding comments and stamps on Lee's drawings and written work. He appeared to appreciate her teacher-like feedback and it gave him a sense of audience and purpose to his self-generated homework.

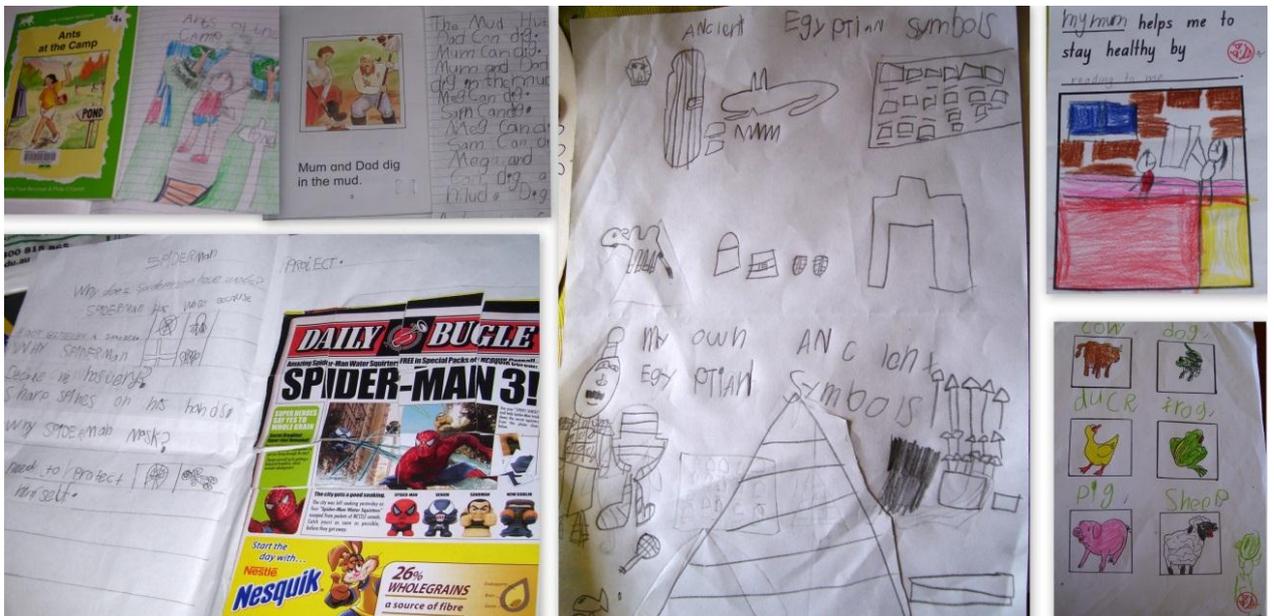


Figure 81. Lee's home projects (left, centre); school work (right).

As the year progressed I was aware of the widening gap between Lee's home-based drawing and writing experiences and those he had at school (Figure 81). For example, by late May he had recreated complex pictures from library books (Figure 81, top left), writing projects on Superman (Figure 81, bottom left), researched and recorded aspects of Egyptian culture and then created his own Egyptian symbols (Figure 81, centre). Meanwhile at school he was drawing pictures to match simple sentences and was writing nouns (Figure 81, right).

His mother must have sensed this disjunction because, around this time, she said, "Actually I have no idea what he learns at school." It seemed, therefore that the official

school curriculum probably fell short of tapping into and extending Lee's academic, artistic or social potential. However, in my opinion, this was not a reflection on Lee's teacher professional capabilities, for she consciously looked for ways to promote Lee's 'hidden' persona (as she understood it through our discussions), and to build on his skills and talents.

In general, at school Lee was quiet, socially reticent and seldom contributed verbally in group situations. Nevertheless, it was clear from observing his body language that he engaged with the sessions. For example, during oral language sessions on the mat children shared their oral stories and the other children asked them questions. At such times I had observed Lee as he frowned slightly, hunched his shoulders and hesitantly raised his hand to ask questions. When he was asked he was often hesitant and made grammatical errors. For example, he asked one child, "*How does a caravan look like?*" On another occasion he asked, "*How big the dog is?*" I knew Lee well enough to appreciate that he wanted to be more involved in whole class discussion but he was embarrassed by his faltering oral skills. On the other hand, when I observed him engaged in art-like activities or self-initiated art experiences, he displayed a vigour and confidence that was more in sync with the confident, capable Lee I had come to know. Therefore, I believe that he would have benefited from regular discussions with just one other person, and to base some of these discussions around his own artworks.

### ***Artmaking to generate an artifact***

Lee's art experiences, particularly those at home, helped him to explore big ideas and to solve his problems in real and imagined ways. In most instances the artworks and art processes wove together seamlessly to generate the art experiences. However, there were specific times in which Lee's artmaking was product or artifact orientated. For example, early in the year Lee excitedly showed me a paper lantern he was making for the upcoming Chinese New Year. As he decorated it Jingjing told me about the New Year festivities and customs. Then she said, "He's quiet at school – right?"

I replied, "As far as I can tell, yes." We both looked towards Lee and laughed. I said, "I know! The two boys I know – Lee the school boy and Lee the home boy"

Jingjing agreed. "The school boy very different, eh?"

Throughout this brief conversation we competed with Lee's excited chatter. He then tuned into the 'quiet at school' comment and told us who was naughty at school. When he told us about the good children I asked him "And what about Lee, is he good?"

Lee proudly stated, *“Class Award – I got!”*

I asked, “What did you get a class award for? Being... [I pause as though trying to guess] a cheeky monkey!”

Lee laughed. *“No, for good writing, good drawing.”*

“Oh I can see why you would get that award. Because you are good at writing and drawing.”

*“If you get five you get a principal’s award,”* Lee explained.

I whistled, “Phew! Are you going to get one of those?”

Lee looked thoughtful. He said, *“Not know. I can make a class award.”*

With that he then rushed from the room and returned with his class award. He excitedly told us that he is going to make himself an award so he could get a principal’s award.

I laughed and said to Lee “You’ll never have to worry about anything because you’ll just make it if you need it.”

Lee then studied the actual award, and employing his ability to move beyond mere recognition to a deeper levels of perception (Dewey, 1934/2005) he created his own version of the award (Figure 82, left).



**Figure 82. Creating a principal’s award; Easter hat.**

This episode crystallised another aspect of Lee’s art experience that I had witnessed on many occasions – that he used his art skills to produce an artifact with emotional value. In this case he made an award and on other occasions he made a Spiderman jigsaw, a soldier’s uniform (badges and medals taped to his tee shirt), a Santa’s beard, music scores, worksheets, Chinese posters, books and toys. These were art experiences in which the products appeared to be more important to Lee than the processes of making them, and in many ways some of these items were the least

'artistic' in terms of aesthetic beauty. For Lee, I could see that artmaking was literally a way to provide for himself and others, and, relating this to Griebing's (2009) research, I could see how these artefacts contributed to his sense of belonging, as he used them to engage with others. However, Deweyan perspectives also prompted me to acknowledge that, even in the simple case of making a principal's award, through artmaking processes Lee had 'transformed' a simple artifact into an expressive object that evoked 'a new emotional response' (Dewey, 1934/2005, p. 82).

It was also evident that Lee experienced satisfaction and empowerment from this ability to create artworks such as these, and he happily chose to use these instead of some more sophisticated versions. For example, Lee's class was provided with craft materials with which to make decorated hats for a school Easter parade. Although Lee had access to these materials, he spent some considerable time carefully drawing pictures on a sheet of light card that was then formed into a cylinder-shaped hat. He then proudly wore his hat at the parade. Jingjing laughed, while also projecting a sense of pride in her son, when she showed me the photograph (Figure 82, right) and said he was the only one to wear a simple hat. One aspect, which I believed made this art experience especially poignant for Lee, was that there was a purpose in creating his Easter hat and having the hat allowed him to fully participate in a social event. From a Deweyan and sociocultural perspective, making his own hat allowed Lee to experience greater 'participation and communication' within his social communities (Dewey, 1934/2005).

### **Lee's sources of ideas for art**

Actual events, such as the Easter parade were significant as sources of ideas for Lee's art. During the Easter period he also created several drawings that expanded on this event. This included drawings of "Easter hat parade with Mr Men" and "Easter Bunny and the Potato Man."



Figure 83. ANZAC commemorations motivated several drawings.

In April, Lee was involved in another parade, when ANZAC<sup>22</sup> commemorations were held at school, locally and nationally. Lee was amongst the pupils who volunteered to represent the school in the ANZAC parade march in that military people in full uniform also marched. These events inspired Lee to create several drawings, including those in Figure 83. The ANZAC events provided dual motivations for Lee's art in that they tapped into his fascination with soldiers and they involved him in an actual event. There were other real life events that provided sources of ideas for his artworks, including the school picnic, the classroom pets, attendance at a stage show and visit from the Life Trust bus. Through creating drawings about these events Lee engaged in the 'remaking of the material of experience in the act of expression' (Dewey, 1934/2005, p. 84) and provided him with a way to re-experience and share his experiences with others in a non-verbal form.

### ***Lee's art in the final weeks of research***

My last visit with Lee was in late June, just before he and his family moved away. Jingjing and I reflected on the past ten months and the research processes. It was affirming to hear that she and her husband had read one of my published articles, part of which reported on Lee's art experiences, and found it "very beautiful, very helpful." Jingjing also said that the research had been good for Lee. She said he had often been excited about meeting with me and this had been good motivation for him to take photographs and to draw.

As usual Lee had many new artworks to share, and in these last weeks of the research he continued to draw many of his favourite themes and characters; such as maps and games, battles and superheroes, sharks and boats, and reinventions of characters from television and books. He continued to express humour through his art, as evident in drawings such as "*Shark on a surf board*" and a "*Man walking a frog-dog,*" and to develop complex drawing-narratives. In addition, he made sense of future challenges through art by creating several drawings based around the topic of moving and relocation.

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<sup>22</sup> ANZAC stands for the 'Australia New Zealand Army Corps'. 25th April, is an annual national day of remembrance.



**Figure 84. Lee's drawings of soldiers and battles; Yu-Gi-Oh cards**

Apart from his numerous drawings, I also noted that his artworks included more collage pieces and his drawings showed more exploration with colour. With respect to the latter, he had moved from filling in shapes with colour (as seen in Figure 79, p. 224) to using colour as a more integral part of the artwork (for example, Figure 84, left). This suggested to me that exposure to a variety of media and art techniques at school had flowed through to his home-based art experiences.

For me, honouring and communicating Lee's perspectives on his art through this thesis was a complex task and I hope that his words and images have conveyed some of the essence of 'Being Lee'. To conclude this section I have chosen to share two of the artworks that he was most excited about on our last meeting; a battle scene (Figure 84, left) and a set of small monochromatic drawings (Figure 84, right). When he showed me his battle scene he excitedly shouted, "*Soldier! He's a soldier over here, here, here* (pointing to four of the green-clad people), *and he's the boss* (lower right). *He's the boss and see, he is right angry!*"

"Oh - he is," I said, looking carefully at his photograph.

"*And there's a fight!*" he boomed.

Lowering his voice, Lee pointed to the faces amongst the green shapes, and slowly whispered, "*A... bad...guy!*"

Enjoying Lee's dramatic retelling, in a hushed tone, I agreed, "A bad guy hiding behind the bushes."

*“And FIGHT!”* shouted Lee, throwing up his arms. *“’Cause he saw them. And jeep, and tank and bomb, Bomb, BOMB! He’s on a rock and he’s going to fall but somebody hit him. See he’s scared and he’s going to run and say ‘Bye! Bye!’”*

Lee displayed such obvious gusto in sharing his army drawings that when his rendition had concluded, I asked, “Do some of the other boys draw pictures, with armies in them, at school?”

In a mock sad voice, he intoned “Never, ever, ever.”

In the background his sister cheerfully added, “He draws them for them sometimes.”

Penny’s comment indicated to me that art had allowed Lee to enter into new participatory relationships with his school peers, where he was an expert and an artist. As Dewey (1934/2005) argued, experiences that were most empowering for people were those in which challenges were successfully met and, when carried to the full, were ‘a transformation of interaction into participation and communication’ (p. 22). I sensed, therefore, that Lee’s interactions with me and others that were based around his art experiences were important features of his social collaborations and co-constructions.

In addition to sharing his battle drawing, Lee had a series of small drawings on the table in front of us (Figure 84, right). He said, *“It’s Yo-Gi-Oh. And you get cards and you don’t see the top of them.”* He handed me some drawn cards but I was not sure what I was meant to do with them. Sensing my confusion, he said, *“And I love these cards, the most these cards, and numbers, numbers...see a cool card and a thousand and a thousand. I’ve been to a movie and they have cards.”*

Lee then proceeded to teach me how to play a Yo-Gi-Oh card game. His ability to create these cards, and to then teach me how to play a game that he appeared to be making up as he went along, was a fitting last interaction between us. For Lee, art was personally and socially empowering – in its varied forms art provided him with tangible ways to transform ‘interaction into participation and communication’ (Dewey, 1934/2005, p. 22) and provided him with means by which he remade ‘the material of experience in the act of expression’ (p. 84). Thus, having art as experience was part of being Lee.



# 11. LILLY AND SOPHIE

## Lilly and Sophie start school

When Lilly was aged 4 years 11 months, and Sophie was aged 5 years 10 months, they started as day pupils at Champion Girls' College (CGC). This was a private girls' day and boarding school with pre-kindergarten to upper secondary classes. The girls were in the same classroom with 11 others, and their teacher, Rebecca Milton, was an experienced teacher and Head of Junior School. Lilly and Sophie were amicable classmates but they did not sit at the same cluster of desks or become out-of-school friends.

In the first three weeks of the first term I visited their classroom after hours and took photographs, talked with their teacher and organised consent forms and the like. Thereafter, in the first term I visited once a week for a 60-90 minute block that often coincided with either an 'Art/Craft' lesson or with a 'Story, Art/Craft' lesson. In the second term I visited for one entire afternoon and two full-days. Apart from the timetabled session on art, craft and stories, Rebecca integrated art activities into many aspects of her programme. In addition, the children had access to good quality art materials and they were encouraged to use arts skills across the curriculum. Sometimes, I was asked by Rebecca to assist individual children or, on one occasion, to take a group activity. I was happy to help as this was one way in which I could 'give something back' but it also meant I sometimes missed observing what Lilly and Sophie were doing.

## Lilly's and Sophie's art experiences

### *Lilly's and Sophie's involvement in art-related activities*

Sophie and Lilly engaged in many art-related activities while at school and their teacher believed that children benefited from learning through a variety of sensory experiences. This was evident on one occasion when the children ran their hands and fingers through foam which was smothered on a large table (Figure 85, left). The girls were encouraged to playfully experience the sensory qualities of the foam and Lilly and Sophie laughed during this activity. The literacy focus of this session was shaping the letter 'O' but it was my impression that the sensory experience focus dominated the literacy one.



**Figure 85. Sensory and art-like activities related to literacy.**

There were various other practical activities associated with learning about the letter 'O' that called upon some art skills. This included completing the outline of an octopus, colouring it in, and then joining dots to make O shapes (Figure 85, centre: Lilly). In a related activity, each girl made an octopus by colouring in a circular-shaped face. They were shown how to crimp the crepe-paper legs, which they then attached (Figure 85, top right). Overall, they produced similar objects and the children were not formally assessed in terms of the quality of their art skills or on their ability to identify or use the letter O. Therefore, it appeared to me that the pedagogical point of these activities was the forming of O shapes, identification of things beginning with O and talk involving O words. However, the children may not have made these connections. For example, I asked Lilly, "Why were you doing an octopus?"

"I don't know," she replied. However, with prompts she recalled that they were learning about the letter O but she didn't know why they coloured in or made the octopuses.

Although such activities were not regarded by their teacher as art, or designed to extend the children's artistic abilities, the children used skills and materials that they associated with art. I had come to appreciate that while adults made clear distinctions between art and non-art activities, the four research participants often did not. Moreover, these activities did carry some beneficial art aspects for the children in that Rebecca prompted the children to exchange positive messages about their work; she cared about providing a positive emotional environment and supported the girls' artmaking in ways

that maximized successful outcomes. All of these features, research has shown (Richards, 2003b, 2004), contribute sources of information that can then raise children's art self-efficacy. I had become more aware of these features of Rebecca's teaching style when a relieving teacher undertook an art-like activity in which the children decorated and stuffed a paper fish. As seen in Figure 85 (bottom right), this activity had little scope for employing art skills although Lilly managed a small degree of difference by putting two stickers on her fish (Lilly's fish is centre; Sophie's is below). Lilly was unable to identify her own work but she was able to identify the literacy focus. She said, "We were learning about ffffff."

While this fish art-like activity was a minor event in the girls' school life, it also resonated with an impression I had gained from Lee's classroom (see Figure 75 left, p. 220). This impression was that a teacher's attitude towards children's capabilities was paramount in the way the children then experienced art across the curriculum, even in simple art-like activities.



**Figure 86. Lilly's pastel and dye: warm and cool colours; monsters; rockets.**

In Rebecca's classroom it also became clear to me that once she had taught the children some new art techniques or concepts she then linked these back into other curriculum areas. For example, in an art education lesson the girls were given instructions and experience in working with pastel and dye and in using warm and cool colours and these art skills were subsequently employed in other activities (Figures 86 and 87). When Lilly viewed one of her artworks (Figure 86, top left) she said, "That's a sea picture."

"You were doing certain sorts of colours weren't you?" I observed.

"Cool colour!" chimed in Lilly. "And that's my sun picture. Red, orange and green." (Figure 86, bottom left).

Thus, she understood the focus on warm and cool colours and accurately described some colours. The girls used these art-making skills when they created their 'monsters' drawings (Figures 86 and 87, centre), which were linked to a literacy focus, and the 'rockets' that were linked to a focus on shapes and the letter 'r' (Figures 86 and 87, right). Although Lilly was usually more articulate than Sophie when discussing her art experiences I noticed that these art-like activities did not often excite Lilly in the way I had witnessed with her home-based drawings.



**Figure 87. Sophie's pastel and dye: warm and cool colours; monsters; rockets.**

On the other hand, Sophie, who had had fewer home-based art experiences, seemed to be enthusiastic about learning new artistic techniques and then being able to apply these to other classroom activities. I also noticed, in both of her sun and monster drawings that she was able to effectively integrate decorative patterning into her artworks (Figure 87, top left and centre). When Sophie discussed her rocket artwork (Figure 87, right) she excitedly pointed out how she had used white pastel to make stars that then showed up only when she painted blue dye on top. Her delight over this 'discovery' also conveyed to me that her art education experiences had a positive influence on the satisfaction she felt in her subsequent art-making sessions. Thus, for Sophie, the school environment supported her esthetic experiences in that she had a greater sense of the relationship between how her art actions led to certain visual qualities. As such there were greater links between her artistic actions and perceptions (Dewey, 1934/2005). She also demonstrated some satisfaction and 'heightened vitality' (p. 18) in being able to talk about her artistic skills.

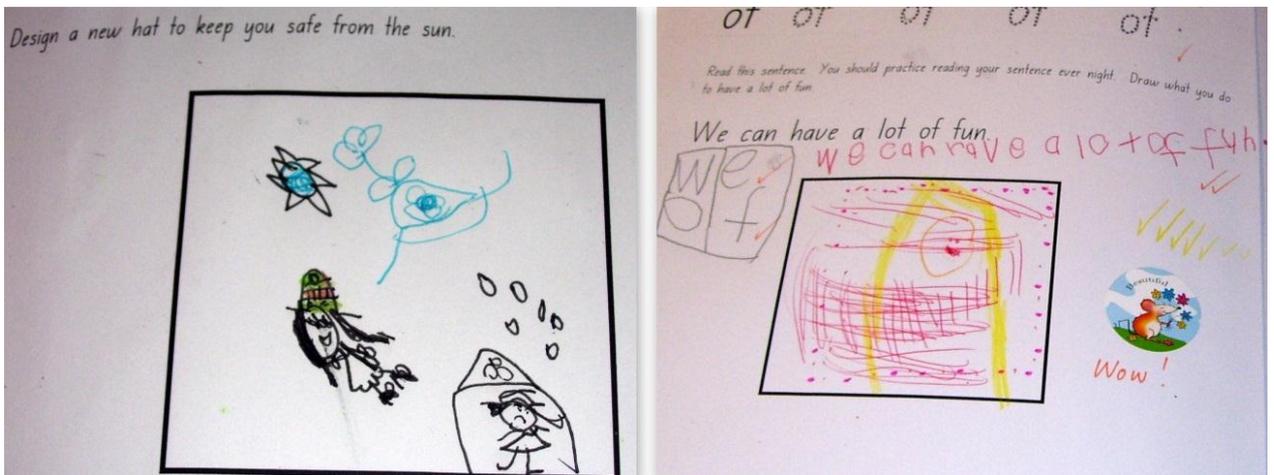
As Lilly had experienced considerably more art at home and preschool than Sophie had, she had developed a wider range of art skills. Overall, she also demonstrated greater personal satisfaction in her art. While Lilly continued to develop complex ideas and images at home, the 'gap' between the girls' artistic abilities was not as evident at school. This gap narrowed most notably when the art activities were

motivated and modelled by their teacher. As such, by comparison with Lilly, it was my view that Sophie exhibited the greater developmental journey as she responded positively to art materials and to the social nature of art-related activities at school.



**Figure 88. Ant drawings: Lilly's; Sophie's; class display.**

In more independent art activities, which were not preceded by a demonstration, Lilly's ability to communicate through art was more evident. For example, when the children drew pictures demonstrating 'things we know about ants' (Figure 88) or drew pictures in their homework books (Figure 89) Lilly's drawings were more complex than Sophie's. In these art-as-communication activities, Lilly had a wider repertoire of drawing styles (Kindler, 1999; Wolf & Perry, 1988) and therefore greater capacity to communicate through her art. However, in the classroom this ability to 'speak' through her drawing was not always communicated to her teacher as evident when her ant drawing (Figure 88, left) was displayed upside-down (Figure 88, right).



**Figure 89. Homework tasks: Lilly's (left); Sophie's (right).**

Each child had a homework workbook. In terms of their engagement in art activities, these workbook tasks appeared to hold little interest for either girl. For example, when Lilly showed me her homework task (Figure 89, left) she made no specific comments about the drawing. I prompted a response by reading the printed sentence but she did not expand on this; instead talking about some of her other home-

based drawings. In terms of art experience, these homework tasks appeared to be 'humdrum' and lacking in relevance – conditions that Dewey (1934/2005) regarded as 'enemies of the esthetic' (p. 42).

Sophie, who had considerably fewer examples of artworks to share with me, took several photographs of her homework book. Sophie's mother later told me about a homework task where she was required to 'draw what you do to have a lot of fun' (Figure 89, left). She reported that Sophie quickly drew a simple face composed from a circle, two dots and a line. She then drew long n-shaped hair. Anna said that when she prompted her daughter to respond more fully to the specified homework task Sophie drew spots and lines across the drawing space. When her mother asked her why she had drawn this, she replied, '*Spots and lines make me happy.*'

There appeared to be some truth in this statement, in that Sophie did like patterns, but her mother also felt that Sophie often took the route of least resistance to satisfy task requirements. Therefore, rather than being a deliberate decorative effect, drawing 'spots and lines' was expedient and reflected a lassitude towards drawing and completing set tasks. While Dewey (1934/2005) regarded the decorative as an important and integral part of a work of art, be it poetry, prose or painting, when the decorative was not integrated into the subject-matter of the art he condemned the 'insincerity of using adornment to conceal weakness and cover up structural defects' (p. 132). In some ways, this was how Sophie had appeared to employ decoration in her homework task and, as will be shown, I observed her similar response to some classroom-based activities. At the same time, I appreciated that while few activities tapped into or clearly promoted Sophie's interest in decorative effects she also subsequently created artworks which had expressive decorative features.

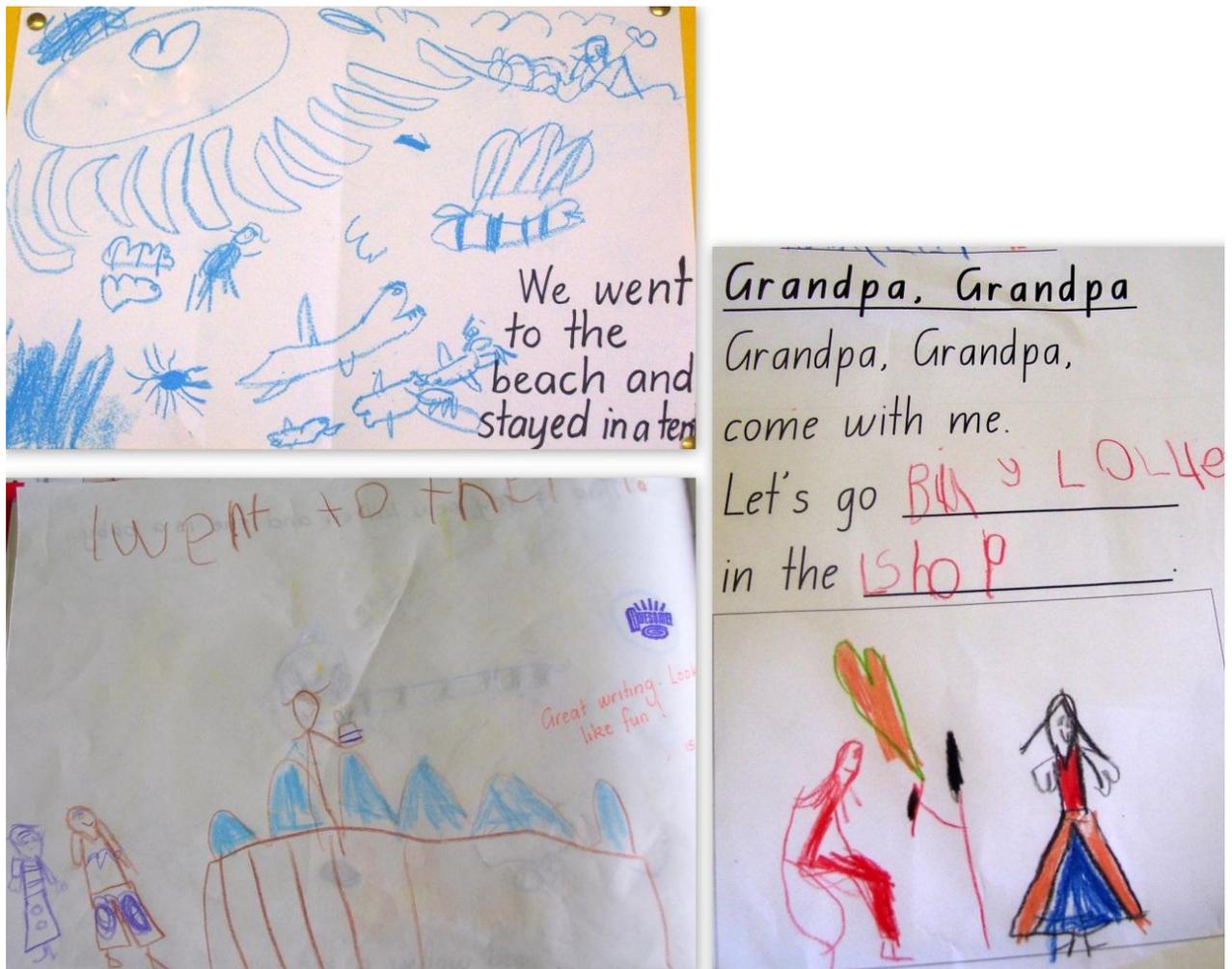


Figure 90. Lilly's drawings associated with reading and writing.

For Lilly, draw-and-write activities such as drawing a remembered experience (Figure 90, top left), drawing in her story book (Figure 90, bottom left) or reading, writing and drawing tasks (Figure 90, right), had the potential to allow her to make good use of her artistic abilities. These learning activities were undertaken by all of the children and parallel examples of Sophie's work are seen in Figure 91.

Early in the first term the children drew pictures about their summer holiday. Later, at home, Lilly looked at the photographs and excitedly talked about her blue beach drawing (Figure 90, top left). She said, "We drew the picture first and then wrote the story. Umm when we went to the beach...can you read that?"

"We went to the beach and stayed in a tent," I read.

"And I did too!" laughed Lilly, "and a jellyfish came up and attacked my toe – I was so scared!" At this point her younger sister excitedly explained how she wasn't scared. Pointing at the drawing, Lilly said, "And, that's sharks and there's shells and that's some

– *what do you call it? Yeah, it's a sea urchin.*” She was excited about this drawing and I asked her if it was finished.

She said, *“I want to do some more but she doesn't want me to – it's on the wall – and that's sea gulls.”*

This draw-and-write activity linked well to Lilly's ability to retell experience through drawing and during my home-based visits the photograph had prompted excited responses from Lilly and her sister. Had Lilly drawn this topic at home I felt confident that she would have revisited this drawing and theme. However, school practices, in terms of both display and timetabling, constrained her ability to extend this drawing. Also, the language elicited from reviewing the artwork was far more extensive than that recorded in the initial school activity. From a Deweyan perspective I could see that, although the display of children's work helped to build the classroom's sense of community through art, it also had the effect of making a child's 'resting place' (Dewey, 1934/2005) in the artistic processes into a premature end point. Thus, in some respects, Lilly had moved too quickly from the 'accrued meanings' of this experience and it had then become more 'flustered' and 'thin' (p. 58) than was necessary. This then provided further evidence that, although this type of art-related activity was used to promote communication, in terms of art experiences some children needed more time to explore and to be able to revisit their art. This could facilitate fullness of experience in terms of visual and written communication.

In the kindergarten class the children also regularly drew pictures in their story books. Once Lilly had drawn her picture, with assistance from her teacher and sight word cards, she wrote a story (for example, Figures 90, bottom left). Lilly had extensive home-based experience in creating and interpreting her own graphic symbols, and she accommodated the inclusion of writing with relative ease. Although she was one of the youngest in her class, as far as I could tell she was also one of the first to independently write words in her story book. A point of difference between Lilly's school-based drawings and her home ones was that the former focused on remembered events while the latter tended to arise out of the expansion of the themes she was exploring – often in realm of fantasy and imagined situations. However, at school Lilly continued to develop her interest in drawing about her family and in Figure 90 (bottom left) she drew and wrote a story based around her grandparents. However, she was not happy about this drawing because of negative remarks from some classmates. She said, *“The girls were being*

*mean to me about that because they said, Nanny and Poppy, I couldn't draw them in the picture. But they were there!"*

"Yeah" agreed her mother. This affirmation suggested that Lilly had already told her mother about the girls' comments.

*"At the town swimming pool," continued Lilly. "And they were getting bossy at me - The kindergarten!"*

These negative responses to her art were new and unwelcome experiences. However, it was not uncommon for children in the first two years of school to comment critically on other children's artwork and for younger children to feel 'uncomfortable when others said they had made mistakes' (Richards, 2009b, p. 136).

There were aspects of Lilly's school storybook habits that were not orthodox and this may have also attracted some negative responses from teachers and peers. For example, by the time Lilly had started at school she had been drawing in art books for several years and when she did so she randomly selected pages, varied page orientation and drew several drawings on one page (as seen in Figure 27, p. 136). When I looked through her school storybook I noticed that she carried some of these habits through to her school work. Thus, her school storybook drawings were sometime upside-down or non-sequential. I commented to Rebecca about the parallel between Lilly's home and school drawing. She was grateful for this insight as she was unaware of Lilly's history of drawing. Subsequently she had interpreted her behaviour as a lack of book knowledge and had been patiently encouraging Lilly to use her book in the accepted manner. Therefore, Lilly received some negative comments from her peers, and some subtle messages from her teacher, which in turn would have influenced her experience of school-based art activities.

Another draw-and-write activity was in the form of reading and writing activities. At home, when Lilly viewed her 'Grandpa, Grandpa' work (Figure 90, right), she recited the words in a sing-song voice, having some difficulty reading her own writing. *"That's Pa"* she said to her mother, pointing to the figure on the right.

I had been at school when the children had drawn these and I said, 'And one of the girls asked why Pa's got a dress on.'

*"Cause he's a girl!"* laughed Lilly. *"Cause he's wearing an apron,"* she said more solemnly.

She then explained that the red figure to the left was her and that she was sitting down in the car. Indicating the heart shape, she said, *"It's a horn – honk, honk!"*

Like Lilly’s classmates, I had thought the drawing was of two females. Based on written cues, I had also misinterpreted the horn and sound bubble as a heart-shaped lolly. Being an audience to this retelling revealed that, although in the classroom there was no external evidence of it, this simple drawing had many of the hallmarks of Lilly’s interests and lively personality. Also, although I was present when the girls undertook this activity, this simple drawing was easily misinterpreted if viewed without the benefit of Lilly’s comments. Therefore, Lilly again received negative comments from her peers, which would have impacted on her drawing self-efficacy. However, research has shown that children with good drawing self-efficacy, which I believed Lilly had, tended to interpret such comments as a fault on the part of the commentator (such as their lack of understanding) rather than a fault in the drawing or in their drawing ability (Richards, 2003b, 2009b). In Lilly’s case, she regarded the girls that commented as “mean” and she initially laughed off the comment about Pa wearing a dress by saying he was a girl. She then explained that he was wearing an apron because he worked in a shop.

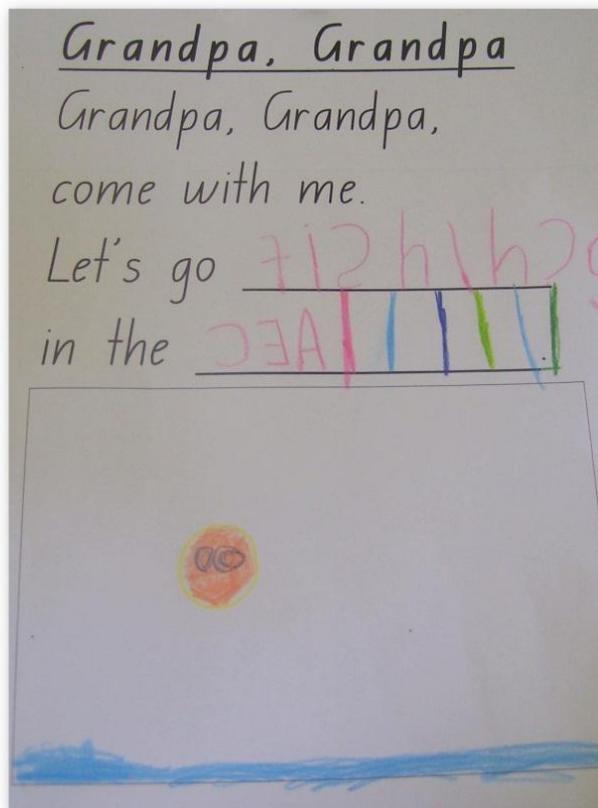


Figure 91. Sophie’s drawings associated with reading and writing.

The Grandpa drawing was part of a literacy activity where the children listened to and responded to a big book. They then drew a picture and completed a written sentence. Rebecca had asked me to roam and assist children with their writing and when I got to Sophie's table she said she was going to write about Grandpa taking her fishing, which was the example given by the teacher. She had drawn three wavy lines on her page and said that was the sea. I prompted her to extend her drawing so she drew a circle, said that it was Grandpa and that she had finished (Figure 91, right). When Sophie eventually handed in the Grandpa work she had coloured in the wavy lines, added eyes and coloured the head. She had also filled the space between the word lines with multi-coloured bars. These decorative lines had as much, if not more, deliberation in them than any other part of her work.

I believed that this task was well within Sophie's capabilities and during my observations I got the impression that she was not willing to commit a great deal of energy or time to this task. Her 'could not be bothered' manner however, may have masked her discomfort with the activity in that later she told me that she had actually drawn her uncle because she didn't do things with her grandfather. With this insight into her perspectives I could see that she had made some genuine attempts to connect her drawing actions with personal experiences. However, the emphasis on 'grandpa' had worked against her making this task meaningful. Lilly, on the other hand, had regular contact with her grandfather and had used these real life experiences to inform her drawing and her writing.

A comparison of Lilly's and Sophie's draw-and-write activities revealed that the girls had similar skills in terms of verbally composing sentences to accompany actual experiences. However, Sophie's drawings, such as those of the beach scene and snake (Figure 91, left), were more basic than Lilly's ones. The two girls were also able to write letters, although at that early stage of the school year Sophie's words were in mirror image and Lilly was able to form words independently. Watching these girls create these pictures and words, and talking to them later, also revealed that Lilly gained a great deal more satisfaction from both drawing and writing than Sophie did.

While I am cautious about claiming an emphatic link between home-based art experiences and school-based writing experiences, Lilly had already developed a strong sense of empowerment from her drawing and her disposition was echoed in her classroom activities – even in the face of some negative comments. On the other hand, Sophie had fewer home-based art experiences. Therefore, she had a smaller repertoire

of images, art styles and art skills to draw upon. Conversely, school offered Sophie the greater scope for personal development in drawing and over time she did respond positively to the art-rich classroom environment. Her steady progress was rewarded with positive feedback while Lilly's established random drawing habits generated some negative responses.

In the kindergarten class, Rebecca had what she referred to as art-and-craft activities. These were generally construction projects with predetermined outcomes such as making a picture frame for Mother's day or a basket for Easter eggs. Rebecca commented that the children enjoyed these activities. When I observed such activities, Lilly and Sophie appeared fully occupied and happy. However, Lilly seldom initiated further discussion with me about these experiences. Sophie, on the other hand, was enthusiastic during these sessions and proud of the artifacts she made. She showed me the photograph of her wearing an Easter hat (see Figure 69, p. 212) and proudly stated, *"We made it! There's a flower on top and I decorated it."*

When the children made these Easter hats they had access to the same resources and their resulting hats were similar. However, while there was limited scope for individual expression, the children created these with a sense of anticipation. These child-crafted artifacts acted as social props that facilitated human interaction – a purpose for making art that has been recognized in other research (Griebeling, 2009) and that I had previously recognized motivated both Lee and Sophie. Also, as Dewey (1934/2005) pointed out, 'Craftsmanship to be artistic in the final sense must be "loving"; it must care deeply for the subject matter upon which skill is exercised' (p. 49). As the art-and-craft activities that I observed all connected with events that the children experienced as personally and socially relevant (such as Easter and Mother's Day) I believed that some children, such as Sophie, cared quite deeply about what they were making and why. As such, even these simple craft activities, by virtue of their subject-matter, held some value as artistic-esthetic experiences (Dewey, 1934/2005) for the children .



**Figure 92. Triangle dragons.**

Some art-related activities integrated art with non-art learning goals. For example, the children created pastel and dye dragons based on the use of triangles (Figure 92). Although this was scheduled within the 'Art/Craft' slot of the timetable, I felt that the requirement to use triangles was sufficiently limiting that this is an art-type activity rather than an art education experience. The session started on the mat and following an introduction, in which the class discussed stories they knew about dragons, the children went back to their desks. At this point six girls, including Sophie, began to draw their own versions of dragons. However, Rebecca had planned to demonstrate how to use triangles and they were asked to get a new sheet of paper and to start again – this time using triangles in the sequence that she modelled. When the children had completed their basic triangle dragon Rebecca discussed how they could add eyes, spikes and legs.

The dragon activity was an introduction to triangles and this aspect dominated over the art-aspect of the experience. As I roamed and assisted the children I became aware that the focus on triangles, rather than the topic of dragons, seemed to be confusing for many of the girls. Lilly had included a 'princess and sister' and the beginnings of a castle in her drawing but when I later spoke to Sophie and Lilly, neither

girl commented narratively about their pictures. They did say that the dragons were made from triangles. In that respect the mathematics focus had been successful but the art focus was minimal. From my vantage point as observer I also recognized that the dragon topic had sparked Sophie's interest, but the 'obtrusion of calculation' (Dewey, 1934/2005, p. 73), which was associated with her graphically representing a dragon using triangles, limited her artistic expression about dragons.

Another activity associated with mathematics was a drawing activity based around 'taking a dot for a walk' – essentially drawing lines (See Figure 68, right: Lilly's work, p. 211). Rebecca asked me to take half the class for the dot activity while she took the others for another activity. The children then changed over. When working with me, the children sat with me in the mat area and I had a blank piece of paper attached to the whiteboard. I drew three simple shapes on the page and modelled how a dot, when 'walked' around these shapes, created a line. I invited the girls to suggest ways to make lines by drawing lines in the air. I then focused on one girl's 'air-drawing' and showed how I could do that with pencil on paper. The children then directed my drawing by suggesting line and dot words, such as squiggle, dash, zig-zag and the like. I took this a step further and suggested we made 'funny noises' that matched our interesting lines. The children then returned to the nearby desks and drew their own line drawings. I encouraged them to chat with each other and to make up interesting line words and noises. As the activity was about to come to an end we again met on the mat and individual children showed the class their drawings and described some of their interesting lines.

Because I was so involved in teaching, it was difficult to gauge the children's responses to the dot/line activity. However, a few days later, when Lilly discussed her drawing she described the qualities of lines using words and expressive noises. She also talked about which lines she liked best. The deliberate link between creative drawing and expressive talk/sounds appeared to register with the children and Rebecca commented that many of the girls took friends to the displayed drawings and talked about them. This activity also had a positive effect on Sophie, because two weeks later when we viewed her dot/line drawing she literally snickered with delight and told her mother it was about "*Taking a dot for a walk – that's my dot.*" This started a conversation between Sophie and her mother about the drawing. I had deliberately encouraged the children's talk and noise-making because my home-based visits in this current research, coupled with insights from some previous research (Richards, 2009b; S. K. Wright, 2005), suggested

to me that when children drew in an uninhibited way, they often used words, songs and nonsensical sounds. Such approaches were also consistent with Vygotskian perspectives on the important links between social interactions, language and thought (Vygotsky, 1962/1934, 1978) and visual thinking and drawing (Brooks, 2005a, 2009). It was interesting to see how this multimodal, social and interactive way of experiencing simple line drawing promoted later verbal articulation of the visual arts experience.

### ***Lilly's and Sophie's art lessons***

Art education activities at CGC were those activities that had distinctive teaching points related to developing artistic learning, and at their core had art curriculum goals. This included art lessons that focused on art skills and techniques, and sessions in which the children used skills and media to generate artworks. In addition to the lessons on warm and cool colours (see Figures 86, 87 left, pp. 237-8), the first term the children created paintings of 'Women who inspire' and of mothers (Figures 93 and 94), drew and painted flowers using watercolour pencils (Figures 95 and 96) and created an owl drawing with a focus on line and drawing techniques (Figure 97). In term two, one art lesson involved drawing grapes using shading techniques (Figure 98). Sophie also did another painting of her mother and a drawing of her brother (Figure 99). In recognition of the way the children developed over time and experience in their artmaking, the following discussions are presented in chronological order.



**Figure 93. 'Women who most inspire us' paintings.**

When I began my observations early in the first term, there was a display of paintings on the theme of 'Women who inspire us'. This was linked to a school wide focus on 'International Woman's Day'. Lilly had painted her mother and sister (Figure 93, left), and Sophie had painted her mother (Figure 94, right).

Sophie's painting (Figure 93, right) had some similar graphic features to ones she had created at home (see Figure 43 left, p. 165) and in her homework book (Figure 89 right, p. 239). Her artwork was the only one of this set of paintings that had a patterned background.

She said, "*There's mama - with rainbow hair.*" I commented that this painting reminded me of an earlier drawing but Sophie did not respond to this comment. Although the paintings were on display in the classroom, Sophie's mother admitted that she had become aware of the display only after another parent mentioned it. She laughingly told me that she thought it was of her, in striped pants, bending over.

In contrast, Lilly's family were aware of her artwork and when we viewed the photographs her younger sister exclaimed, "That's me!"

"*You look like a princess,*" Lilly replied, "*I made it good so you look like a princess.*" Although the painting was quite basic in comparison to her finer drawings, Lilly proceeded to point out features to her sister.

In comparison with Lilly previous drawings, her painting was relatively basic. It occurred to me that the girls' previous painting experiences at preschool had been on self-selected topics and on paper that was four times larger than that used at school. Therefore, not only were the children painting pictures based around a set topic for the first time, but they were using large brushes on relatively small paper.



**Figure 94. Our mothers: Lilly's; class display; Sophie's.**

In the CGC kindergarten class, about two weeks later, each child painted another artwork on the topic of 'My Mother' (Figure 94) and this gave them an opportunity to refine their artistic skills and ideas. Lilly's painting in particular, appeared more controlled

(Figure 94, left) than her earlier one (in Figure 93) and Sophie had attempted some detail on the face (Figure 94, right).



**Figure 95. Lilly's watercolour pencil flowers.**

The children also had an art activity in which they were introduced to art techniques using watercolour pencils (Figures 95 and 96). Rebecca demonstrated how the children might go about drawing a rose by using a spiral shape as a starting point. She also provided a real rose for the girls to look at, touch and talk about. The children were then given paper with a starter shape on it (Figures 95 and 96, left) and after they had completed their first drawings, subsequent drawings were created on blank paper. When the children were familiar with using the dry watercolour pencils, Rebecca demonstrated how to blend colours with a wet brush. The children were encouraged to create their own versions of flowers and the diversity of paintings revealed that the children were developing their own individual styles.



**Figure 96. Sophie's watercolour pencil flowers.**

Lilly and Sophie both created three artworks. For Sophie, this was unusual and was testimony to the satisfaction and challenge that this lesson provided her. The girls' first drawings, which directly followed the teacher's introduction and demonstration, were the most complex and perhaps aesthetically pleasing (Figure 95 and 96, left). Although the subsequent drawings/paintings may not have been as 'beautiful' they were created more independently and allowed the children a greater degree of exploration.

This aspect of Rebecca's approach to art education was an important feature in that it provided some scaffolding for the children within their 'zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky, 1978). Also from a Deweyan perspective, as the children engaged with increasingly independent art-making processes this provided them with the sorts of challenges that, when successfully met, led to both growth and development and esthetic experiences (Dewey, 1934/2005). I felt there was evidence of this in Sophie's third drawing where, having mastered some new techniques, she tapped into her penchant for design work and began her composition by drawing a line of circles (Figure 96, right). She subsequently used this decorative flower design in two other artworks during the term and I sensed that Sophie had moved from the use of decoration to 'cover up structural defects' towards a more deliberate and satisfying 'expressiveness of decoration' (Dewey, 1934/2005, p. 132).



**Figure 97. Sophie's owl drawing; completed work.**

Although Lilly was away, I observed Sophie's involvement in another art lesson that was based around *Owl babies* (Waddell & Benson, 1992). Sophie, having watched her teacher's demonstration on how to use lines and shapes to draw an owl, returned to her desk and drew the owl outline. She then added wings, beak, eyes, claws and a branch. Rebecca roamed and supported the girls' efforts, and when most of the girls had finished their basic drawing she directed their attention to the way the book's illustrator had used various types of lines to draw feathers. Sophie briefly tuned into these comments and then talked with classmates as she drew her feather patterns (Figure 97, left). At this point I left Sophie's table and roamed around the classroom, as requested to by Rebecca. When I returned to Sophie's table I saw that she had turned her pastel broadside and covered her entire picture with brown. This action surprised me as she was usually so meticulous with her colour work and the other girls had successfully created carefully drawn and coloured pictures.

Sophie did not comment on her reasons for doing so and I was at a loss to understand her motivation. One connection that I later made was that, a few months earlier, Sophie had created one of her few spontaneous artworks in which she had drawn a bird on a 'bird sign' and had then coloured it over with black (see Figure 45, p. 167). This earlier art experiences had created interesting interactions between her and I and she may have made connections between this event and her owl drawing. Also, at

school the owl art session was on a day when the children had been swimming. Rebecca and I noticed that the girls were restless and Sophie's body language suggested that she was tired. Perhaps the brown colour was a quick way to 'finish' the work. However, these were speculations on my part as Sophie did not tell me why she coloured over her owl in that way.



**Figure 98. Groovy grapes: Lilly's (left); Sophie's (right).**

Lilly and Sophie were involved in another art lesson that was based around creating a shaded picture of grapes, using coloured pencils, and then collaging on leaves and tendrils. I was not present when the children created their 'groovy grapes' artworks, and although I discussed the photos with Lilly she did not elaborate on the experiences. The display and the style of the children's artworks suggested that there had been a specific focus on shading. As Lilly had demonstrated a keen interest in developing her drawing and art skills at home, her lack of comment suggested to me that either she did not make a link between her personal interests and this art lesson or that she had not enjoyed the experience. In her grape drawing there was evidence that she had drawn several grapes of various sizes on the same page (Figure 98, left) – a habit she had at home when perfecting a drawing technique. Yet in this drawing, the odd sized grapes gave the impression that Lilly had difficulty with proportions, when in fact she generally did not. On the other hand, Sophie's grapes looked like they had been drawn with care and precision. It occurred to me that this lesson's focus on using lines and cross hatching to show shading would have registered with her interest in decorative lines.

This was the last of the art education lessons that I was aware of during my school visits. I will return now to a more personalised discussion about Sophie and Lilly's other experiences of art in this phase of the research.

## **Sophie's participation and communication through art**

Throughout the research, Dewey's philosophies on art as experience (1934/2005) informed my understanding of the children's art experiences. At the same time my wider view of children's experiences was informed by Vygotskian sociocultural-historical perspectives. As such, there were many situations in which I recognized that, through interpersonal relationships and co-constitutions, intrapersonal development took place (Vygotsky, 1978). While I could see that this was true of the four research participants at home, preschool and school, in Sophie's case, this social aspect of art experiences came together most in the classroom. Towards the end of the research Sophie displayed enjoyment and playfulness in art that had been absent earlier on. For example, when she painted her Mother's Day portrait (Figure 99) she appeared to genuinely enjoy the painting experience. What was more, her painting was well developed and had some clear visual features, such as the pink dress and the short black hair, that described her mother well.



**Figure 99. Sophie painting; Painting of her mother; brother with rainbow hair.**

During my last visit to CGC I observed Sophie engaged in a free choice drawing activity. Again, I had insights into the way Sophie had started to enjoy art as a social experience that connected her with others. She told her friends that said she was going to draw her brother, Greg, and put a dress on him. The girls laughed and watched as Sophie drew her brother (Figure 99, right). She obviously enjoyed the camaraderie and

the attention her drawing had created, to the extent that later she showed it to the whole class.

When Sophie viewed this drawing at home, her siblings and mother were present. Sophie laughed and said, “*Greg – with a love heart and rainbow hair.*”

This generated interest and reactions from Sophie’s family as they leaned in to take a closer look at Sophie’s art.

Watching both Sophie’s growing enjoyment of art at school and her lively interactions with her family, suggested to me that as she had grown in confidence in her art-making and in her expressiveness through art. As such, this had given her the sort of esthetic experience that led to ‘a transformation of interaction into participation and communication’ (Dewey, 1934/2005, p. 22) as she joked with friends and was the centre of family attention.



**Figure 100. Sophie's home-based art: Painting on canvas; drawing an Easter card.**

This new found vigour appeared to carry through to her home-based art experiences also. Although she still did not engage in art activities on a regular basis at home, on at least two occasions Sophie and her siblings were involved in semi-organised art activities, as seen in Figure 100. These activities revealed a new vitality in Sophie’s experience of art. For example, when she showed me her canvas painting (Figure 100, left) she said with obvious pride, “*I painted it!*”

“Did it take you a long time?” I asked.

“*Two days!*” replied Sophie.

Spending two days working on this painting was a new and clearly enjoyable experience for her. This provided a glimpse into Sophie’s development towards art as artistic-esthetic experience for as Dewey (1934/2005) stated, ‘that which distinguishes an experience as esthetic is conversion of resistance and tensions, of excitements that in

themselves are temptations to diversion, into a movement towards an inclusive and fulfilling close' (p. 58).

For Sophie, this was also a social experience as the three siblings had all painted canvases, with Greg designing and creating his own picture. Both Sophie and her younger sister had pre-drawn designs and Sophie had enjoyed extending the design with her own decorative effects. She happily discussed how she had mixed various colours and, in a way that I had not witnessed before, she enthusiastically articulated her plans for completing the canvas. For the first time at home I sensed the heightened vitality that art experience brought (Dewey, 1934/2005). Her mother also commented that Sophie did not want to pack up her paints, but they had to as they had been working on the dining room table. This reinforced the impression I had gained across the research that a dedicated art space, which allowed for mess, was beneficial to children's positive experiences of art.

Sophie and her siblings also made Easter cards (Figure 100, right), and on this occasion the children worked at a table that allowed them to stay set up. Sophie enjoyed the social aspect of this art experience as she worked alongside her siblings. Unlike art activities of a year earlier, Sophie had developed the confidence and repertoire of art skills that allowed her to be innovative rather than imitative. Also, her canvas painting and Easter card revealed her more deliberate use of decorative effects. Moreover, it was my opinion that Sophie did not just get 'better' at art because she was older. She developed artistically because of her positive art experiences at school and the continued interest in her art that this research provided.

### ***Last words from Sophie and her mother***

Although I did not meet up with Sophie again in person, at the end of the school year we spoke on the phone. She proudly told me that, on her end-of-year school report, art was her best subject. It seemed to me, therefore, that her minor breakthroughs into having more fulfilling art experiences, which I had witnessed over the course of the research, had continued to develop into meaningful art experiences for Sophie.

Eighteen months later I returned to Ashtown for a brief visit and I met with Sophie's mother. She said that Sophie had also developed a keener appreciation of decorative effects and often stopped to intensely study a pattern, artwork or design. She said that Sophie would often 'see' things that others missed and would draw her mother's attention to the patterns she found interesting. It seemed to me then, that Sophie's earlier

interest in patterns and design was the beginning of an aesthetic appreciation of art and of the visual world. The challenge that she had set up for me, as an art educator, was to be more conscious of ways in which some children explored pattern and design through their art experiences and to find ways to help them express this through artistic-esthetic experience (Dewey, 1934/2005).

## Lilly's other art experiences

The new school year had brought many changes for Lilly in that she also shifted house. She continued to share many drawings with me but her mother pointed out that she had taken a while to settle into routines in their new house and many of these drawings were actually created prior to the move. Attending school also influenced her home-based art habits and when I asked Lilly if she was still making lots of drawings and paper constructions her mother replied, "Not nearly as much as she did before she started school." However, once the family had settled into their new home, Lilly returned to some of her former habits such as drawing as part of bedtime routines. She also had her own bedroom in which she had a large desk and table lamp. This area became her main site for homework and for drawing.



Figure 101. Lilly's drawings: love; marriage; pregnancy.

Lilly continued to explore her big ideas through art, especially those associated with being female and developing drawing techniques. For example, she drew pictures

featuring women as wives, brides, girlfriends and mothers. She also drew pictures that explored ideas about being in love, getting married and being pregnant (Figure 101).



**Figure 102. Lilly: School girls; Pocahontas; square writing and drawing.**

The nature of Lilly’s school-based art activities did not appear to be a major influence over what she drew at home. However, being amongst a group of female peers and teachers appeared to support and extend her interest in themes associated with being female. For example, Lilly drew some pictures of groups of same-age girls and in Figure 102 (left) she specifically drew a group of schoolgirls in uniform. She said “*It’s a whole class but somebody is missing...they’re not my class – they’re a different school.*”

Lilly continued to work with fine detail and she progressed from contour drawings using various colours to rendering her drawings with detailed colour, such as the one of Pocahontas (Figure 102, centre). She also developed drawings that contained a combination of images with words, letters or numbers. I asked her to tell me about the drawing shown in Figure 102 (right).

She said, “*That’s nothing. That’s just learning how to write numbers and how to write name-squares.*” Pointing to the square-like marks used to form her name<sup>23</sup> she said, “*It’s easy to write. This is how to write my name square.*”

In this, and similar drawings, the words and numbers were not an important part of Lilly’s overall drawing or integral to the narrative of her drawing. However, her experimentation with writing with ‘squares’ was an example of the satisfaction she received from developing graphic skills. However, apart from an ability to write

<sup>23</sup> Words in the photograph have been obscured to maintain some degree of confidentiality.

independently from a young age, very little of her interest in developing drawing techniques was visible at school.



Figure 103. Lilly's D is for duck; caterpillars.

There were drawings at home however, that originated from school-based experiences. For example, when Lilly showed me her drawing of birds (Figure 103, left), I commented, “You did D for ducks at school and the top of the duck looked like that didn't it?” (Figure 103, centre).

She said, “*I tried to write duckies and birds and I think that one is the goodist.*”

“Is that one there?” I asked, pointing at the duck head on the lower left side.

“Yeah,” she replied, “*cause ducks don't have hair. It starts with 'duck'.*”

Lilly hesitated and looked at me. She then asked, “*Is d like a duck? That's like a duck.*”

While she appeared a little confused by the notion that ‘d was like a duck’ she picked up on the graphic features of the duck's head and had incorporated these into her own drawings. In another artwork, she had reconstructed the knowledge she gained from a school-based activity in which she made a caterpillar from paper shapes, to drawing circular shapes to make a caterpillar (Figure 103, right column).



**Figure 104.** Lilly's drawings of Sophie's family.

Lilly often drew pictures of females, but drawing boys proved more problematic. While Sophie had joked about drawing her brother wearing a dress (see Figure 99, p. 255) Lilly had appeared annoyed when children claimed she had drawn a dress on her Pa (see Figure 90, p. 241). Although she had a history of experimenting with her drawing approaches, after a month at school I noticed her heightened anxiety about other people seeing her drawing 'accidents'. For example, at home she drew a series of very small and detailed drawings of Sophie's family (Figure 104). As was her habit, Lilly had drawn several pictures on the same page and had drawn the family in several different domestic scenes. This included drawings of people watching television, lying on a couch, in a wheelchair and eating at the family table (Figure 104, right). The family, which was drawn in the centre of the page, was no taller than five centimetres (Figure 104, left).

Lilly explained, *"Well it's Sophie's mum and dad, Sophie and Charlotte and Greg."*

"Did Sophie see the drawing?" I asked.

*"No she doesn't know."*

"Should I show it to her when I visit her?"

*"Ahh...don't tell her how I drew the hair 'cause I accidently drew girl hair – see everybody's got girls' hair."* She pointed out the male characters on either end of the group (Figure 104, left). Therefore, while Lilly had developed an extensive repertoire of drawings, she still struggled with representing boys. Neither her school nor home experiences had offered her insights into how to tackle this aspect of drawing difficulties.

As the fieldwork phase of the research drew to close, it seemed fitting that these last drawings that Lilly shared with me were on the theme of relationships, as she not only explored this through her art, but cared about having positive relationships with others.

### ***Last words from Lilly***

As it turned out these were not the last drawings that Lilly ever shared with me. With the support of her parents, Lilly stayed in contact with me via Skype video calls and has shown me many more of her artworks. I noticed that she had continued to develop her big ideas, which I had identified in this research, and had extended her interests and skills in drawing building plans. During one of her Skype calls she also showed me her series of watercolour portraits of girls. She had continued to use her art books but painted or drew only one artwork per page. She also asked for my feedback, and in the spirit of co-construction as a fellow artist, I gave it to her. Her younger sister sometimes joined in these calls and showed me her artworks. These contacts have been welcomed and Lilly has told me on several occasions that I can do some more research with her now she is older – a possibility that her parents have endorsed and that has some merit. Meanwhile, I am grateful for the many insights into her art experiences that Lilly has shared with me through this research.

## 12. JACKSON

### Jackson starts school

When Jackson was aged 5 years 7 months he started school at Sandy Bay School (SBS), which was one of the larger public primary schools in Ashtown. He was in a kindergarten class with 21 other children and his teacher, Vanessa Taylor, had mainly taught in junior classes. His teacher and the school principal were supportive of the research and I enjoyed some flexibility in my schedule of school visits. In the first term, I usually visited once or twice a week at times likely to coincide with art-related or free choice activities. In the second term I also observed for two full days.

### Jackson's art experiences

#### *Jackson's early art experiences*

Jackson had looked forward to starting school and he appeared to settle in well. Although I did not visit his classroom in the first few weeks of school I did meet with Jackson at home and he was excited to show me his school art.



Figure 105. Jackson: coloured-in cake; paper snake; crane.

From Jackson's perspectives, his first set of artworks included several worksheets that had involved him in colouring-in, writing and drawing. For example, he was keen to show me his coloured in birthday cake with candles drawn on top (Figure 105, top left). He was especially proud of this carefully coloured work as it earned him a principal's certificate for the 'work of the week'. Because Jackson's home-based art projects continued to be fairly complex, I was a little surprised by how delighted he was with his school-based worksheets and how he regarded these as his art. However, when he explained how he had received praise from his teacher and the principal I could see that this had been very affirming for him. Also, upon reflection I realised that this feedback contrasted with the subtle messages he had received at preschool about his art, in that he had been regarded as too bossy. In addition, working with two-dimensional media was relatively new to Jackson and as such this simple colouring and drawing activity was emotionally rewarding and, to some extent, cognitively challenging. As such, from a Deweyan perspective, mastering these simple tasks, and being rewarded for doing so, provided Jackson with a sense of 'an inclusive and fulfilling close' (Dewey, 1934/2005, p. 58).

### ***Doing it the right way***

At preschool I had also noted that Jackson would have benefited from situations in which he was the novice and could learn from someone with greater skills. School offered Jackson this opportunity. However, as research has shown, school children are also receptive to messages about the 'right and wrong' ways to do things and transfer these messages to their own art experiences (Richards, 2003a). I found that Jackson did this also. For example, in my first home visit Jackson also showed me a spiral paper snake that he had coloured in and cut out (Figure 105, bottom left). I asked why they had made these at school and he shrugged. His mother suggested that it was part of a focus on the letter 'S' but Jackson was adamant that it wasn't.

Jackson sternly claimed, "*We had made it in a different room.*" This suggested that one way in which he made sense of the purpose of a learning activity was by relating it to the physical space in which it took place.

At home, Jackson was continuing to fold and make paper planes that were more complex than this snake. He had also developed his crane concepts further and made a large crane mechanism from cardboard rolls, a coat hanger and string. He demonstrated how his crane worked – with the string running through the centre (Figure 105, right). He

also showed me how his planes flew and he talked about the modifications that he had made to improve them. His home-based structural projects were significantly more complex than his paper snake so I asked if he was able to make his own snake.

He replied, *“I didn’t make it.”*

I commented that he probably could work out how to make it.

His mother agreed.

Jackson then got out some paper and gave it to his mother. He said, *“Mummy, remember you can do art.”*

Sally drew the basic shape and showed Jackson how the spiral got smaller and smaller. She invited Jackson to finish it.

Emphatically Jackson shouted, *“Mummy, you do it. Mummy, I can’t...I want you to do it. You’re better at doing it.”*

“Tell me where I have to go,” Sally said.

Jackson explained, *“You have to go around – do the tongue.”*

“Should we start from the middle? Where do we start?”

Jackson pointed, *“Umm, you start from up there.”*

“Up there you reckon - up there? I’m going to start here,” Sally commented while pointing at the centre.

At this point Jackson became quite agitated. *“Mummy you are not allowed to. They told me how to do it. They didn’t start there! Now you have to rub it out!”*

Jackson was about to get an eraser but Sally turned the paper over. She said, “Show me then. What did they say you have to do?”

*“Start – from – there,”* Jackson stated.

His mother then suggested that they each have a piece of paper and made their own versions. However, Jackson continued to direct his mothers’ drawing.

*“It’s not going to work. Mummy, it’s not how you do it anyway. Then you have to draw the tongue. Then you’ve got to do another line.”*

“You think?” responded Sally calmly.

*“You do!”* By this time Jackson sounded cross and unhappy. *“You don’t just go cutting around there - you’ve got to have another line.”* He insisted that Sally drew more lines. He said, *“It’s not going to work – do it my way.”*

Sally suggested, “You do one - your way.”

*“I can’t!”* shouted Jackson.

When Jackson stormed off to his bedroom Sally and I discussed how this episode was unlike Jackson's usual response to construction tasks. I commented that this was the first time I had heard Jackson say 'I can't', and to insist that there was only one correct way to make something. Also it was unusual for him to be bad tempered about anything. Sally was also surprised by his reactions as they had previously collaborated on many projects. Therefore, it seemed as though the messages from school had influenced his belief in his ability to successfully complete a task in the 'right' way. Also, despite his successful co-constructions with his mother, after two weeks of being at school he was critical of his mother's help because it didn't match the way his teachers did things. Nevertheless, despite his obvious distress Jackson did not abandon his quest to make another snake and he brought me a piece of paper and directed my drawing.

This time he got agitated with me and said that I had drawn it too small.

His mother again suggested that he made his own one to which he replied, "*I can't do it neat.*"

In Jackson's home experiences of constructions, neatness was low on his priorities and decoration was attended to when the structure was completed. However, it appeared as though his experiences of school had led him to place greater emphasis on neatness, and he was applying this criterion to constructing his paper snake.

### ***Jackson's Photography***

At home, Jackson continued to explore visual effects through photography. He regularly took colourscape photographs (see Figure 61, p. 192) and, when he shared these, his mother and sister often observed. While some of his photographs were initially accidental, often when he had discovered new visual effects he attempted to recreate the conditions. For example, he had experimented with taking black photographs (see Figure 61 top right, p. 192) but taking a fully white photograph, which was not merely a close-up of a white surface, was difficult. However, he had worked out how to do this by holding his palm a certain distance from the camera lens when in bright light.

Jackson's older sister, who six months earlier had been slightly derisive about his colourscape photographs, was also experimenting with close-up images of fabric and patterns. Together, they told me about the 'interesting' photographs that Jackson had taken of moving things that then appeared stationary (see Figure 61 bottom right, p. 192) and how they used the timer mode and had set up photographs of themselves. The siblings talked excitedly about these discoveries and about their construction work.

Jackson's confident experimentation and the animated manner in which he shared such experiences contrasted greatly with his reactions to the spiral snake experiences. For Jackson, home-based art experiences, such as photography, construction and drawing transformed his participation into positive and constructive interaction and communication (Dewey, 1934/2005) with his sister and parents.

### ***Jackson drawing at home***



**Figure 106. Dad drawn on Magna-doodle; Mother's day card.**

Shortly after starting school Jackson created several drawings, on a 'magna-doodle', of his father (Figure 106, left). I was surprised by the complexity of these drawings when I considered that he had previously created few such drawings. In these latest drawings he appeared to have had some difficulty drawing feet and had omitted these. I had noticed that Lilly had also had problems in drawing feet and she had dealt with it by practicing drawing these. In Jackson's case he did not take this approach but there was evidence in his mother's day card (Figure 106, right) that he had transferred his graphic symbols for hands to feet in that he used splayed lines to represent toes.



**Figure 107. Drawings: Bush; Sydney Harbour Bridge celebrations.**

Up until this time it had been my impression that Jackson was confident in his photographic and construction skills but that his drawing skills were less well-developed. However, I re-evaluated this further when a month later he drew a chalk picture of trees and bush (Figure 107). This drawing was more complex, in terms of composition and detail, than any of his previous drawings. On another occasion he created a drawing of the Sydney Harbour Bridge (Figure 107, right) after watching the televised 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the bridge. This drawing included a train crossing the bridge, a plane flying overhead and a man fishing from a boat. Jackson had written, *"I sea Jackson."* The egg shapes in the sky were indeed Easter eggs and these represented the celebration, as did the hearts. The 'hugs and kisses' (Os and Xs) were his twist on the idea of having fireworks.



**Figure 108. Jackson's fishing boat drawing; actual model.**

An even more surprising drawing, in terms of the sophistication and detail, was Jackson's drawing of a fishing boat (Figure 108, left). He proudly stated, *"I drew that,"* and pointing to the model also he said, *"That is that."*

I asked him if he had drawn it all himself.

He said that he had.

His mother, however, pointed out that she had drawn the lines of the hull to get him started. After that point he had drawn the rest. He had used skills associated with observational drawing as he had referred to the model boat to gather information for his drawing. From a Deweyan perspective, I felt that this episode provided a clear example of the way in which Jackson had moved beyond mere recognition of the structural features of the model boat, to a perception of how these could be translated into a two-dimensional artwork. It was also clear that having achieved this success in his drawing was satisfying as he wrote on the drawing, *"I drew this myself."* He had then given it to his teacher who subsequently displayed it on her desk front. With obvious joy Jackson explained, *"She nearly gave me a pink one...you get an award at the end of the year."*

Both the chalk and boat drawing were created by Jackson when he was absent from school for approximately two weeks. Jackson's 'sudden' ability to produce sophisticated drawings suggested several things to me. Firstly, it suggested that, for some children, drawing development was not always preceded by graphic evidence of earlier stages of drawing development, as often represented in traditional theories of artistic development (for example, Kellogg, 1969). Secondly, Jackson developed his drawing capacities without apparently engaging in traditional drawing activities. While it was difficult to arrive at conclusions regarding causal effects, Vygotsky's (1962/1934) notion that learning can lead development, led me to wonder if Jackson's construction and photography experiences provided him with the sorts of symbolic meaning-making learning experiences that also supported his drawing development. This crossover of media and development also supported the notion that children's languages took many forms, including drawing (C. Edwards et al., 1998; Milikan, 2010). Thirdly, factors of time, space, resources and personal well-being appeared to constrain or promote certain types of art experiences. For example, while Jackson often chose to make constructions, when conditions limited his ability to do so, he concentrated on drawing instead.

### ***Jackson's block, wood and box constructions***

During Jackson's convalescence at home he also entertained himself by making constructions with small building blocks (Figure 109, left and centre). Just as at preschool he had both drawn with blocks and engineered structures, so too did he with these small blocks. For example, he pointed to one small flat structure and said, *"People*

- *holding hands.*” (Figure 109, bottom left) and in describing a vertical structure (Figure 109, centre) he said, “*The longer the bottom is, the higher it gets*” [before it topples]. However, he said that he was not able to test that because he did not have enough blocks to make it “*really high.*”



**Figure 109. Small block constructions (left, centre); chicken cross (right).**

During his convalescence he also made one small woodwork project in the form of a cross decorated with red dots (Figure 109, right). He said, “*Chicken cross – for when a chicken dies. Foxes kill them.*” He told me that a chicken hadn’t died yet but he had a cross ready just in case. Thus, Jackson continued to value the way in which his decorated constructions also had functional purposes.

Listening to Jackson describe his theories of block building stability reminded me of a conversation I had had with his teacher. When she had seen photographs of his various constructions (for example, Figures 47 and 48, pp. 176-177) she commented that these required a “whole lot of maths skills” that weren’t necessarily evident at school. She wondered, therefore, if he should have been amongst the children who received extension activities in mathematics. On my part, I had come to think of Jackson’s interests as being in the realm of physics and engineering, but, like many of the school-based conversations about learning, children’s experiences were considered in relation to either literacy or numeracy.



**Figure 110. Airport terminal and plane; Titanic.**

While Jackson continued to be interested in home-based art projects his mother pointed out that, since starting school, “we don’t have as much time and Jackson’s art is limited to the weekend.” He did, however, have one major box construction underway in the form of an airport terminal building (Figure 110, left). His sister was helping him with the construction and she readily admitted that he was “the boss of it.” Over several visits I watched as Jackson project-managed an extension to the airport terminal building, the construction of a plane (the yellow boxes) and an air bridge (the wine box) that connected the plane to the terminal.

Later in the school term he also built a large model of the Titanic (Figure 110, right), which had been a topic of interest for some time. He had started with one box but then asked his parents for more. Apart from demonstrating Jackson’s commitment to using what he believed were the correct materials, this also demonstrated how patient he could be in waiting for the right materials. As noted, in Dewey’s (1934/2005) view, part of the rhythmic development of experience was apparent as a person’s immediate actions built on their past experiences and involved cognisance of future intentions. In Jackson’s case I believed that his work on his Titanic model demonstrated this building on of past experiences and also his forward thinking. When he constructed his model he connected three boxes, shaped the ship’s bow from cardboard and then attached four funnels made from cardboard tubes. Jackson had explained to his father that, on the actual Titanic, the fourth funnel was not functional and had been added so the boat looked right. It was evident to me that projects such as the airport and Titanic constructions (Figure 110) were art experiences for Jackson that provoked family conversations, interactions and co-constructions. As such his art experience facilitated deeper engagement with his

family and an ‘interpenetration of’ Jackson with his ‘world of objects and events’ (Dewey, 1934/2005, p. 18).

With the help of his parents Jackson took his model to school to show his teacher and classmates. This suggested that he was proud of his model, and also confident of both his family’s support and his teacher’s positive reactions. Jackson was the only one of the four research participants who was proactive in bringing his home-based art experiences into the classroom environment and I believed that his teacher’s positive attitude towards art, and her relationship with her pupils, contributed towards his confidence to show his model at school, and to give her his fishing boat drawing. Despite such support, I did not see evidence of Jackson’s funds of knowledge, interests or big ideas being built on by his teacher in the classroom environment.

### ***Jackson’s communication about and through art***



**Figure 111. Zoobs construction; subsequent modelling and drawing.**

On Friday afternoons, Jackson’s class had ‘free’ play where they chose from a variety of activities. Most of these activities were based around a creative activity such as drawing, role play, or construction. One afternoon, Jackson and his friend, created a vehicle-like structure (Figure 111, left). At home, he said to his mother, “*That’s Zoobs.*” He then tried to explain how Zoobs® connected with ball and socket joints and how he could make them shoot off. However, appearing unconvinced that his mother understood, he asked her to hold her finger and thumb together. He then put his fingers through hers and showed her how it worked. He said “*You got to do that when it shoots*

*off.*” Jackson was still not satisfied that his mother understood, so he asked for a piece of paper. He formed his own hand to symbolise the ball and socket joints and drew his diagram from this model (Figure 111, top right). As he drew he talked about the various components and how they fitted together. He then drew an arrow to show the direction of the movement when the pieces shot apart (Figure 111, bottom right).

This was an example of Jackson communicating about, with and through his art. To begin with he had verbalised an explanation, using the photographs as a reference point. When this didn't satisfy his need for clear communication he looked for a prop or 'helping means' (Vygotsky, 1960, 1986/1934) - in this case his mother's fingers. Lastly, he drew a diagram in order to explain how he constructed with Zoobs. This multimodal communication was not unlike Lee's earlier use of the Battleship game to explain his drawing of a computer game (see Figure 6, p. 100). In Jackson's case, through actual experience he had discovered how objects connected and, with force applied, were propelled apart. His use of drawing to explain these concepts was an example of how his spontaneous concepts were developed to more scientific concepts (Vygotsky, 1962/1934) – that is, through his verbal explanations, demonstrations and drawing, he developed and shared his understanding of connecting parts, forces and deconstruction. His use of drawing aligned with research that showed that children in the first year of school used drawing to move from a referential symbol, to a contextualized personal concept, to a more complex and conceptual level of thinking (Brooks, 2002b, 2005a, 2009).

### ***Jackson's art-related activities at school***

Jackson enjoyed a wide variety of art-related activities in his classroom. From my perspective, what set Jackson's classroom art activities apart from those in other participants' classrooms was the manner in which his teacher conscientiously developed the children's art skills across the curriculum. Such dedication was time consuming and often demanding in terms of display, classroom management and resources. Apart from Vanessa's skills as a teacher, Sandy Bay School had a reputation for promoting the arts and each year they mounted an extensive exhibition of the children's artworks. Having visited the exhibition previously it was clear to me that the children's displayed artworks resulted from long term and well-resourced programmes. This exhibition had also provided the children with an audience for their art and was an added incentive for

teachers to teach the arts well. However, as far as I could tell, the children in Jackson's class were not yet aware of their future role in the exhibition.



**Figure 112. Art-type activities in Jackson's classroom.**

Jackson's classroom was festooned with the children's artworks and at any one time, there were several art-type activities in process. As such, the children's work occupied several work spaces and I said to Jackson, "Look at all the stuff on that table." (Figure 112, left).

"Yeah," replied Jackson, as he zoomed in on the photographs.

I asked, "Is this what you do when you're reading or learning new words, or art or..."

"Art! That's an igloo. Watch this." Jackson flicked through several photographs, stopping at Figure 112 (centre). He continued, "That's a little bug. He tried to dress as a bee and that's how he worked out."

"Why did you make igloos out of cotton wool?"

"It looks like snow," replied Jackson.

When we looked at the colourful trains (Figure 112, right) he said, "Maybe that's my one – I think it is. That's the ones that are finished." As the trains were coloured in the same sequence, and had the same number of objects glued to each carriage, I asked, "Was that maths when you did that, or art?"

"Not maths," Jackson replied. He then explained how everyone got two straws and three pipe-cleaners to stick on but he didn't know why they had made them.

### **Jackson's art lessons**

In addition to the many art-type activities across the curriculum, Jackson's teacher also had scheduled art lessons and of the three teachers, she appeared the most confident at teaching art skills and processes. During one of my observations the children were seated at their desks with pre-drawn pictures of a sleeping cat and Vanessa was concluding a demonstration on how to blend colours (Figure 113, left). She

encouraged the children to choose their own colours and to create various textures. She also said, “No cat is the same,” and reinforced this message by producing two different examples in her demonstration. However, she also wanted the children to work at a similar pace and told them, “Once you have done the face, you need to fold your arms.”



**Figure 113. 'Cat on the mat' art lesson.**

Jackson and the other children worked at their desks and their teacher roamed and assisted. At times, pupils would leave their desks to take a closer look at the teacher's examples. While I noticed that most children were busily colouring their pictures Jackson was not. Instead, he looked very uncomfortable, as he hunched over his artwork and used his arms to cover some of his work (Figure 113, centre). I surmised that he had finished colouring the cat's face and rather than stopping here, as his teacher had instructed, he had begun to colour in the body. Therefore, he was hiding his 'mistake' from the other children as pupils in Jackson's class were quick to 'tell on' each other when the teacher's instructions were not followed. However, once Vanessa had visited his desk and talked to him about his drawing (see Figure 70, p. 214) he continued with his colour work. Vanessa then repeated the process of demonstration followed by children's semi-independent work until all the pastel work was completed.

After the session I asked Vanessa about her teaching strategies. To paraphrase her comments, she said, “This approach is very structured but what I am doing is giving them lots of skills so later on I'll give them pastels and paints. They've had a chance at doing layering of colours so later on they'll have more freedom.” This long term strategy appeared to underpin many of Vanessa's art activities in the first two terms – as evident by the many art-type activities that the children engaged in. However, while the children clearly understood that they were to follow her instructions, I did not think that they understood that these skills would later lead to independent work. Having observed Jackson's discomfort, and being cognisant of the impact of messages on children's art self-efficacy (Richards, 2009b), I believed that the children would have benefitted from

knowing this – and from understanding that the teacher was showing them just one of the many ways artworks might be created.

Over several sessions, in which the children were taught various art skills, Jackson completed his cat artwork with pastel and dye (Figure 113, right). Although the lesson was fairly structured, the children’s work showed some degree of individuality and Jackson looked forward to giving his artwork to his mother for Mother’s Day.



**Figure 114. Jackson’s Easter art-and-craft activities.**

Around Easter the girls made Easter bonnets with flowers, crepe paper and feathers, while the boys made hats with a paper Easter Rabbit and feathers (Figure 114, left). As usual, Vanessa put a great deal of planning, effort and resources into helping the children to create these items. In addition, such activities required the children to complete their work in stages and this approach was a familiar one to Jackson, who often revisited and extended his artworks over a period of weeks at home. For Mother’s Day the children created cards (Figure 114, centre), collaged hearts with printed poems (Figure 114, top right) and constructed heart-shaped puppets from pre-drawn designs and folded paper (Figure 114, bottom right).



**Figure 115. Portraits of mothers.**

Also, in association with Mother's Day, each child created a portrait of their mother (Figure 115). This, and their Mother's Day card, offered them the greatest degree of personal interpretation and, in that respect, I felt came the closest to constituting art experience. Also, as Vanessa had suggested, the portraits of mothers built on and extended the art skills learnt during the 'cat on the mat' art lessons. The children also had some freedom with this portrait artwork in that they drew the entire picture themselves (as opposed to having a pre-drawn outline). Jackson's teacher provided demonstrations by developing her own artwork and giving careful instructions (Figure 115, left) and the children created these fairly complex artworks over a series of art lessons. As evident by the variety of portraits (Figure 115, centre), although the lessons were reasonably structured the children created artworks with individual styles. Jackson was pleased with his artwork (Figure 115, right) and excited by the prospect of giving it to his mother. As I noted from my observations in the other participants' classrooms and homes, all four children enjoyed creating art as gifts and used their art to show affection, a purpose for art noted in other research (Griebeling, 2009; Richards, 2009b).

Jackson clearly enjoyed the Easter and Mother's Day activities. He and the other children had developed habits of working on art-type and art education projects over sustained periods, setting up and cleaning up resources and responding to their teacher's demonstrations while still developing their own style. However, despite such activities, I saw no specific examples of Jackson developing his *own* ideas through two-dimensional or three-dimensional media in the classroom. The only exceptions were the drawings and constructions created during free choice session, which tended to be temporary (such as with the Zoobs construction in Figure 111, p. 272). When I asked Jackson if he drew much at school he replied, "*No not really.*"

## Jackson's art at home



Figure 116. Jackson's home-based art: Planes and rockets.

Although Jackson had little opportunity to draw and construct around his favourite themes at school he continued to work on a variety art projects on his topics of interest at home. For example, towards the end of the research period he had developed a series of drawings and small constructions based around his interest in aeroplanes (Figure 116).



Figure 117. Art at home: bookmark; Meccano crane; collages; wood constructions.

He had also developed confidence in using various other art materials and in his final sets of photographs illustrated his growing competencies in exploring a variety of new art media. For example, over a two week period he drew a bookmark for his father (Figure 117, left), built a 'Meccano' crane (Figure 117, centre left), created collages from natural materials (Figure 117, centre right) and made a wooden gate and a decorated crossbow (Figure 117, right). The variety of styles and media that Jackson employed was also testimony to his increased repertoire of art styles.

### ***Last words from Jackson***

My last official research visit with Jackson was in late May. He had maintained his enthusiasm for his art and for my visits throughout the research. As was fitting, in our last session Jackson took charge of the photography (Figure 118, right). He also showed me his latest artworks. One of these drawings was a detailed and accurate replica of an image from the back of an old matchbox (Figure 118, top left).

Jackson said, *"Look at that. It's meant to be coloured like that. That's a Messerschmitt 109. I coloured it like that. I didn't do the outlines. My mum did."*



**Figure 118. Messerschmitt; pears in crayon and dye; Jackson as photographer.**

He flicked through some more photographs and showed me a painting of pears (Figure 118, bottom left). He said, *"That's a piece of art I did all by myself! I painted those. I didn't paint the yellow bits."*

“Is it on a canvas?” I asked

*“No. Piece of cardboard. And guess what - I did it at my Nana’s who is an artist,”*

he said proudly.

“Oh really. Did she talk to you while you were doing it?”

*“No just copied it. And look my mum did the outside and I did the colouring in.”*

In the home situation I realised that the nature of his collaboration with his parents, sister or grandmother was such that, even when they helped, Jackson felt ownership of the entire process and artwork. This was one of the lasting impressions I had of Jackson’s art experiences – that sensitive collaboration between a boy and those who cared about him, was a powerful and positive way for Jackson to experience art. This was something that I felt that we, as educators, needed to understand and build upon through co-construction with children in educational settings.

I now draw to a close this part of the thesis. This chapter on Jackson’s home and school art experiences marks the last of a series of chapters dedicated to re-presenting each child’s experiences of art at home, preschool and school. Some key findings will now be discussed further in the following chapter. This final chapter deals with conclusions, implications and recommendations.

## 13. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout this research, the children's perspectives have been central to my understanding of how they experienced art in their homes, preschool and schools. To return to an earlier metaphor of Google Earth, the preceding data chapters have 'zoomed in and zoomed out' of individual children's experiences of art as I have reconstructed reflective images of their everyday art experiences across multiple spaces and across time. Research data, in the form of photographs, conversations and observations, have generated some 'street views' of the children's experiences and a sense of how these children lived within social and cultural environments. Broader patterns emerged across the case studies as children's stories of experiences unfolded, and links were made between these and other research and theoretical frameworks, in particular the philosophies of John Dewey as expressed in *Art as experience* (1934/2005). I will now briefly describe some of these 'patterns' and discuss their implications for practice and research. This discussion focuses on selected key findings that compliment and extend our current understanding of the nature of children's art experiences in their homes, early childhood and beginning school settings. For clarity, the discussions are placed under headings and subheadings, but in reality these categories are interwoven.

### Conclusions and Implications

The first point in building an understanding of the nature of young children's art experiences across home, early childhood and school settings is the realisation that such experiences were complex and varied. Some of the children's engagement in art-related activities generated superficial responses, while others generated artistic-esthetic experiences in that there was an overall pervading quality to the experience (Dewey, 1934/2005). Through children's perspectives it became clear that these more significant art-related activities, which I regarded as their 'art experiences', did not always result in sophisticated artworks. If anything, episodes of significant art experiences may have appeared, on the surface, to be 'off-the-cuff'. However, this research provided insights over time that accessed children's perspectives and led to a deeper understanding of the nature of spontaneous art. It is this point that I will be expanding upon first.

## ***Spontaneous art***

Looking at the children's 'spontaneously' created artworks, while co-constructing an understanding with each child about how he or she experienced such spontaneity, led me to concur with Dewey's assertion that the 'spontaneous in art is a complete absorption in subject matter that is fresh, the freshness of which holds and sustains emotion' (1934/2005, p. 73). Furthermore, such spontaneity was a mix of past and current experiences and 'the result of long periods of activity' (1934/2005, p. 75). As such, rather than being off-the-cuff, the children's spontaneous art was usually linked to their on-going personal interests and big ideas. Also, when spontaneously producing art, children appeared absorbed in the process as they worked with conscious intentions. As such, there were clear indications that their art actions were informed by their perceptions, and that their perceptions were informed by their art actions. Thus, spontaneous art was often an important component in the children's art experiences and was in the realm of artistic-esthetic experiences (Dewey, 1934/2005).

Traditional investigations into children's spontaneous art has often focused on drawings (as opposed to other art media), home-based art experiences, child-art that has been created without obvious adult influences, and art produced when children are 'not given a set task' (Matthews, 2004, p. 167). This thesis extends these understandings and re-sketches the boundaries of what should be regarded as spontaneous art. Firstly, this research has demonstrated that spontaneous art was not limited to two-dimensional media and formats as it could be expressed through a variety and mix of media and formats. This was especially true for Jackson who favoured structural art projects and digital photography.

Secondly, also echoing Dewey's (1934/2005) philosophies, I could see that the children's spontaneous art had temporal dimensions, in that such experiences linked their past and current experiences while also embodying a sense of their future experiences. For example, when Lee created his game-drawings he drew upon his past experiences of the conventions of games (such as rules, challenges and having turns) and brought these into the current experience of drawing. He did so with an understanding of how this current experience would be experienced in the future as a shared game. Furthermore, when Lee shared his game-drawings, he re-experienced the game and spontaneously added to the drawing. Thus, as this and other examples have illustrated, motivation to spontaneously create art was not always anchored to the initial

stages of an artwork or expressed by starting a new one. Therefore, while many of the children's spontaneously created artworks did appear as quick and perhaps even inconsequential art activities, other spontaneously produced artworks were quite sophisticated and well-developed. Thirdly, on a related topic, these children did not just come up with something 'new' when spontaneously creating art. Even when exploring new materials and possibilities, the children tended to link into their dominant themes of interest and their big ideas. The relationship of art to children's 'big ideas' is discussed shortly.

The fourth point is that, the children's private moments of spontaneous artmaking were physically and cognitively demanding as they grappled with the connection of what had been done with what they were to do next. Dewey regarded this as one of the 'most exacting modes of thought' (1934/2005, p. 47). Thus, at the time of creation they sometimes needed private spaces and uninterrupted time. Although the children liked to bring their work into a public forum and to have the support of others, communication with others during the initial stages of creation was somewhat difficult and potentially disruptive. This caused some tensions for the children, especially in educational settings where courteous verbal communication was expected. For example, when Jackson made a complex block construction at preschool other children joined in. Because he had a plan for his construction, he was critical of his friends who "*messed it up a bit*" and attracted negative attention from his teachers. As a bilingual child, Lee also had difficulty communicating his art intentions to the extent that he avoided preschool art activities in the presence of other children. In part, the need for private space and time was also influenced by the intensity of thought that Lee and Jackson felt when they created art and their need to have uninterrupted dialogues with their own art (Brooks, 2002a, 2005b). I saw that there were also artworks that the children wanted to keep private. For example, when Lilly drew pictures of Sophie's family she did not want these shown to Sophie or to her classmates. Also, on some occasions when she used drawings as an emotional outlet she did not want to talk about some drawings.

The fifth point is that the children also cared about bringing some of their spontaneous art into a public or shared experience because they cared about others having an understanding of their art. When faced with challenges to be understood by others, some children used art, drama, props, words, and symbolic re-representations to convey their meaning. These eclectic multimodal ways of communicating and acting were more appropriate in the home environment than preschool or school. This was

because it was not always easy or quick for a child to communicate and the listening audience had to be focused, responsive and patient. I had many enlightening conversations with children, at home especially, but I saw no examples of this sort of intense interest in their artwork in their preschool or schools. The children also risked negative reactions when they shared their art. This sometimes happened in the home, such as Jackson's sister's initial reaction to his photographs, but the children were resilient to such comments in a supportive family environment. Children at school also gave some negative comments and these were less welcome. Lilly in particular, had quite negative drawing experiences at school compared to her home and preschool experiences. This mismatch between home, preschool and school art experiences, and the flow between these contexts will be discussed later in this chapter.

Finally, it seems straightforward to state that the children could not spontaneously produce art if there were no resources available, but this wasn't strictly accurate. Lilly, in particular, gleaned art resources from her environment in a way reminiscent of a magpie finding treasures amongst another species' junk. Jackson responded to the natural environment as though it offered ideas for his art, and Lee was constantly on the lookout for visual information to inform his maps, games and story-drawings. Even Sophie, who was the least inclined to spontaneous art experiences, responded artistically when her mother inadvertently created a 'mess' of recycling materials. Therefore, although the children did need access to materials in a timely manner if they were to generate spontaneous art, in the right environment they were able to meet these needs themselves. This brings this discussion to the next point about dedicated and contested art spaces and resources.

### ***Art spaces, materials and resources***

For children's art activities to develop into fuller art experiences, as I understood them in a Deweyan sense, children needed some dedicated art spaces and resources. At home, Lee, Lilly and Jackson had access to dedicated and flexible spaces in which they could experience art. Lee tended to confine most of his art activities to the dining room table while Lilly spread her art activities throughout the house. Jackson created three-dimensional works and he often used outside spaces and floor spaces. He also worked alongside his father in his workshop. In terms of art materials, the children sometimes experimented with new materials but, in general, their most satisfying art experiences involved media that enabled them to extend current interests. For example,

Lilly produced countless detailed drawings with her new fine-tip pens but she had limited success with manipulating the compressed foam. This is a reminder that good basic art materials are often more engaging for children than the gimmicky, and often far more costly materials produced in the consumer marketplace for children.

Overall, the physical attributes of the art spaces were not as significant as the way the children experienced them as 'lived space' (van Manen, 1990). For Lee, Lilly and Jackson they had dedicated, social art spaces in which they had control over materials; they were able to create, store, and revisit their art projects; they could leave work-in-progress and not risk being asked to 'pack it away'. In this respect the space was historical in that it held past artworks, current projects and future promise. Another important dimension to these creative art spaces was that they were social while also allowing for private time and space. For example, they were not tucked away from the hustle and bustle of daily family life, yet, at the same time the children could work there uninterrupted and without having to wait or compete for resources. Jackson's family recognized this when they provided him with a few of his own carpentry tools. Sophie's tidy home environment appeared to lack this type of 'messy' space that generated the feel of an art studio. One may assume that she did not have it because she was not particularly interested in art – but equally it appeared that when 'junk' became available, or artmaking was a socially interactive family event, she was interested in art. Also, on one of the few occasions when she enjoyed an ongoing art project at home, it was undertaken in a space that needed packing up. Therefore, when children undertook art activities in these contested spaces it placed limits on their current art activity. It also limited their future access to ongoing art projects.

Preschool and school had more contested spaces than long-term dedicated art spaces. For example, the children at preschool had a dedicated craft table at which they often worked. However, these spaces needed to be packed up daily and the children's work was put in small folders to be taken home. These folders were not suitable for big or three-dimensional artworks. Also, as children took their art projects home it was not possible to revisit these in subsequent art sessions at preschool or school. Moreover, it became evident that when they discussed their artworks with an interested audience their interests were re-ignited and often led to them extending their artworks if these were available. Therefore, I believe that there is educational value in teachers in early childhood centres and in schools allowing children to store their work in accessible spaces that then enables them to engage in on-going art projects. Such access is also

likely to provide opportunities for teachers to listen to children's comments and engage in discussions with them, as they make modifications or extend their range of artworks. It appeared to me, that too often the children's ideas did not come to fruition in their preschool and school settings, for, as Dewey (1934/2005) pointed out, when 'we move too rapidly...from the base supplies – of accrued meanings' then 'the experience is flustered, thin and confused' (p. 58).

Compared to preschool, the school's dedicated artmaking spaces tended to be more temporary and short-term. The children usually engaged in art activities at their own desks that were also used for numerous different activities over the day. In addition, there were also specialist areas set up with such things as paints and dyes, as relevant to the current learning focus. Jackson's teacher came closest to replicating some of the dedicated spaces that some children enjoyed at home. For example, in her classroom art-related projects were undertaken over numerous sessions and the children had on-going access to art materials and art working spaces. While this was demanding for the teacher, as a 'lived space' (van Manen, 1990) this classroom was art friendly. I believed that these factors, and his teacher's interest in the children's art, contributed towards Jackson's decision to bring a large box construction to school and to give his teacher one of his drawings. However, during the school phase of the research, although all four children explored some form of box or 'junk' construction at home and preschool, Lee's classroom was the only one in which there was potential to engage in such art experiences. Overall, therefore, I came to the conclusion that schools and centres could make greater links with children's home-based art experiences by providing spaces for children to work on their on-going art projects, and allowing access to simple recycled materials for making three-dimensional constructions.

I also came to realise that display space was also an important, and sometimes problematic, art space for children. For example, three of the children proudly showed me that their artworks were displayed in their own homes. While the preschool did not often display children's artworks the teachers did photograph some of their artworks and place them with learning stories in individual journals – which the children and parents found fascinating. At the schools, classroom teachers dedicated time, resources and spaces for displaying children's artworks and art-related activities. While having artworks displayed was generally a positive experience, both Lilly and Lee indicated that if they had had access to their displayed artworks they would have kept working on them. Their reactions resonated with other research with children that showed that displays can be a

contested site that children have little control over (Richards, 2009b). At the same time, it was evident that the children derived some pleasure from being able to contribute to school displays, a phenomenon also noted in other research (Griebeling, 2009).

In terms of art materials, the children had school environments that were rich with resources. They had access to some materials, but others were made available only when they related to the curriculum focus or lesson. In this respect, in most cases the children's more meagre home-based art supplies held more potential for them to spontaneously create art.

There were some other differences between home and school resources in terms of how they were interacted with. Lilly in particular experienced a disjunction between her home-based and school-based habits of drawing in books. For example, she had a long history of generating freehand drawings in books and these drawings were plentiful, experimental and adventurous. However, she had few opportunities to exercise these freedoms at school and when she transferred some of her drawing habits to her school context she received subtle negative messages. In the three schools, every week the children drew at least one picture that went with their personal stories, but this approach did not link into the myriad of imaginative fantasy topics, philosophical ideas and images from popular culture that the children explored at home. Instead, as noted in other research (Thompson, 2003), these drawings were based on 'topics related to the official curriculum' and left little room for children to explore images not sanctioned as 'appropriate concerns of childhood' (p. 141). I believe, therefore, that the addition of a simple drawing book at school, which the children could have used in their own way, would have gone some way to linking home and school art experiences. This is a suggestion I will expand on shortly.

This research showed that each of the children actively sought to extend their knowledge and visual information about their topics of interest. As children did not have the freedom of movement afforded adults they relied more on their immediate environment to provide visual information. At home, children garnered art ideas and techniques from books, films, toys, games, posters, videos, computer games, outdoor spaces and television. When visual information linked to the children's key interests and big ideas then mere recognition of their visual environment was replaced with a deeper perception of qualities and how these could inform their artmaking (Dewey, 1934/2005). For example, Lee responded to the real map to inform his own map-drawing, Lilly drew pictures based on the illustrations in her *Wizard of Oz* book, Jackson drew a picture of

the family's model fishing boat and Sophie made a sketch of a displayed artwork. Lee and Jackson also followed drawing instructions given on a children's television programme. For Jackson in particular, the natural environment also suggested extensions to his art, such as a tree branch becoming a sling shot and photographic 'accidents' becoming deliberate colourscape photographs.

Another school-based 'resource' that was often overlooked as a powerful source of motivation for children's art was children's active involvement in real events that linked to their personal interest and big ideas. For example, Lee's interest in military themes made ANZAC celebrations the inspiration for several drawings and Lilly's interest in clothing extended to drawings of girls in school uniforms. In these situations the children's immediate environment, and the events they engaged in, were sources of motivation for their art and I believe that these should not be overlooked as sources of motivation that support and extend children's interest in creating artworks.

### ***Exploring big ideas through art***

It is well documented that, through drawing in particular, children demonstrate keen interests in exploring certain themes and topics. Often these themes have been considered in terms of gender stereotypical behaviour and in the early stages of my research I could see gender bias for various art themes. However, over time and with access to their perspectives I came to realise that those art themes that they explored often and with increasing complexity were often philosophical in nature. The children puzzled over complex issues, ideas and the meaning of experience. As Wartenberg (2009, p. 14) pointed out, 'specifically philosophical issues arise that children think about a great deal' and I came to think of these issues, as expressed through art, as their 'big ideas'. While the children's art experiences were influenced by their home-based 'funds of knowledge' (González et al., 2005; Moll et al., 1992), that is the routines and practices that constituted their everyday experiences at home, I believed that their big ideas were also distinct from these in that they explored bigger issues. For example, through their art, the children in this research explored issues associated with belonging, personal and cultural identity, transformation, family relationships, being female, emotional responses through art, graphic effects, beauty and design, and making sense of the physical world.

It was my experience in this research that children's artworks provided them with a means through which they communicated with others. Their artworks, and associated descriptions, also revealed more about their big ideas and interests than did verbal

conversations. Therefore, while I believe that children's spontaneous art can be indicative of their thinking it can also be more than that – it can provide insights into theories and philosophies and how they make sense of past, current and future experiences. An understanding of the children's artistic processes when exploring big ideas therefore, can open up new ways of communicating with young children. It can also provide new insights into what is needed in the provision of relevant educational resources and the structuring of integrated learning. In general, understanding individual children's big ideas, and the way he or she expressed ideas and meaning through his/her art, would go some of the way to bridging gaps between children's experiences at home, preschool and school.

### ***Supporting children's art experiences: Attitudes and interactions***

This research confirmed aspects of Ring's (2003) research findings in that mothers played important roles in supporting their children's home-based art through the organisation of time and space, provision for child-initiated and directed activity and tolerance of mess. However, I found that fathers also played similar roles, as did older siblings. What was more, the manner in which the children assumed roles of experts and novices when interacting with parents and siblings, was important. There were numerous examples of children, parents and siblings collaborating on projects and rather than closing down possibilities for children, or lowering their art self-efficacy, this had positive effects on artistic development, attitudes and competencies.

At preschool the children had some opportunities to learn new art skills and to be the novice, but this was done mainly through observing others, rather than through having 'expert' help. In many ways the children became experts at home and brought these funds of knowledge into the preschool environment – such as Jackson teaching others to make paper planes. On the other hand, in terms of art, schools provided many situations in which children were regarded as novices but scant opportunity for them to act as experts. In many ways, I felt that the schools underestimated children's artistic capabilities or failed to make links to their funds of knowledge and home-based experiences.

Teacher attitudes, and institutionalized expectations, were also important influences on how art was experienced in the preschool and school. In this study the teachers had some positive attitudes: Lee's teacher believed that young children were very competent and capable of doing many things themselves; Sophie and Lilly's teacher

believed that young children benefited from learning through a variety of sensory experiences; and Jackson's teacher took every opportunity to develop the children's skills and to lead them towards more independent work. These attitudes contributed towards some positive classroom experiences of art. However, overall I did not see evidence of children engaging in their preschool and school art to the extent that I believed they had already done so at home. Most significantly, in terms of Deweyan perspectives, the lack of children's involvement in on-going art projects that linked to their big ideas and home funds of knowledge, limited their ability to have a sense of artistic action informing perception and then leading to a satisfying conclusion - the hallmarks of artistic-esthetic experience (Dewey, 1934/2005).

In both formal education settings, art activities were constrained by perceived safety issues, teacher-child ratios, time allocations, curriculum expectations and teacher beliefs about art and learning. Consequently there was often a mismatch between the level of complexity of art experiences at home, preschool and school. In general children showed the greatest competence at home. The exception was for Sophie, who did little home-based art but began to flourish in the art-rich classroom environment.

### ***Art-related activities in the classroom***

The children engaged in many art-related activities in their classrooms. Although many of these were not intended to be regarded as meeting curriculum requirements for 'art education' the children regarded them as being part of their experiences of art. I regarded the various art activities as art-like and art-type activities, as art-and-craft and art education activities, art-as-communication and art-as-exploration. These types of art activities were not mutually exclusive and children were not necessarily aware of the distinctions that I had perceived. However, I believe these general classifications may be useful for teachers in terms of thinking about the nature of children's experiences of art, especially in terms of the art and non-art curriculum focus and the degree to which children or teachers had input into the direction such activities took.

In educational settings some art themes and interests were more socially acceptable or supported than others. For example, even though Lee's interest in soldiers was recognized by his preschool teachers, it was not encouraged. At school, Jackson's interests and skills in construction with wood and cardboard were not developed and Sophie had no direct input into developing her interest in design and patterns. Furthermore, in terms of art education at school, there was not a clear alignment

between the officially documented curriculum goals, the way the teachers then translated these into learning activities, and what the pupils actually did. For example, in Lee's classroom lesson, the curriculum focused on self-identity, the teacher encouraged the children to look at variety of Van Gogh's artworks and the children did paintings on any topic they chose to – in Lee's case he painted pictures based on his personal experience of school events and objects. I concluded from this that teachers and curriculum designers would benefit from more professional development that helped them to understand how to write, plan for and implement effective early childhood art education that built on children's personal interests and artistic capabilities. They would also benefit from access to research such as this current research in that it contributes towards them building an understanding of how young children might experience art-related activities in the classroom.

In a related point, this research revealed that the children were usually able to articulate their own art plans and purposes. However, in the classroom setting they seldom had the teachers' plans and purposes clearly explained to them. For example, Jackson's discomfort with his cat drawing and his concerns about making a paper snake the 'right way' may have been alleviated if he had had a better understanding of the purposes of such activities. Furthermore, in my view, the children were capable of understanding current actions in relation to future events – such as learning art skills now so they can be more independent later. Apart from witnessing the children's ability to manage on-going projects at home, as they contributed their photographs and discussions to this year long research project, I also observed their ability to make links between past, current and possible future art action. Therefore, I believe that teachers in both early childhood and school settings could enhance children's experiences of learning through the arts if they engaged in more open dialogue with the children and co-constructed some common understandings about the purposes of art. There are models of research, such as that by Jordan (2003, 2004), which could support such moves in art education.

### ***Artistic development over time***

While this research was concerned more with the nature of children's art experiences than with their artistic development, there were insights into significant events in children's artistic development. Such insights were possible because of the longitudinal nature of the study and the insights gained from children's perspectives. For

example, episodes that involved risk and success, where challenges were acknowledged and overcome, acted as important moments in children's art experience and artistic development. For as Dewey (1934/2005, p. 69) stated, 'an impulsion cannot lead to expression save when it is thrown into commotion, turmoil.' For example, Lee's struggle to communicate about his shark computer game using the Battleship game as a prop appeared to be pivotal in his artistic development in terms of developing concepts and artworks that integrated computers and games.

As noted earlier, an understanding of the children's big ideas evolved over time. The same was true of my understanding of children's artistic development. If I had seen just one set of Jackson's full single-colour photographs, or not talked with him over a long period, I may have interpreted his photographs as being evidence of a lack of knowledge about camera use (just as Lilly's teacher saw her school-based drawing habits as being a lack of book knowledge). I observed that all of the children, in home-based situations, persevered to achieve meaningful outcomes. This resonates with Dewey's statement that 'that which distinguishes an experience as esthetic is conversion of resistance and tensions, of excitements that in themselves are temptations to diversion, into a movement towards an inclusive and fulfilling close' (1934/2005, p. 58).

Another interesting implication that arose from the findings was that home-based drawing experiences appeared to assist in children's ability to write at school. However, it was not only drawing that may have assisted children to write, but the use of any symbol system through art. In Jackson's case there was some indications that his 'sudden' ability to produce sophisticated drawings may have been made possible via his experiences with construction and photography. Although I am wary of claiming an emphatic link between various modes of artistic and symbolic development, it did appear that a child's three-dimensional and digital art experiences, when taken to the level that he or she engaged in complex artistic-esthetic experiences, did support development in other symbol systems such as drawing and writing. To some extent, I felt that this finding supported and extended Brooks' (2002a, 2006, 2009) art research that demonstrated that, through drawing, learning can lead development.

### ***Art experiences are transformative***

The final point I make in this section is that through my interactions with these children I came to see that their art experiences were transformative at many levels. Through art these children transformed their physical, social and personal worlds as they

transformed materials into art media; they transformed their solitary play experiences into vibrant intrapersonal dialogues; they transformed their understanding of the world they lived in; and they transformed interaction into participation and communication (Dewey, 1934/2005). They used art to provide for themselves in terms of games, learning experiences, cultural artifacts (such as class awards and Easter hats); to make sense of history and change; to link events, places and people; to record aspects of the world around them; and to meet emotional needs. I came to see that for children art was more than just a way to amuse themselves; instead it was a core experience that gave them meaningful interactions within their social and cultural worlds, reciprocally contributing to and expressing their personal funds of knowledge and sharing and expanding their big ideas about life.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In discussion so far I have outlined some of the conclusions I have drawn from this research and in doing so I have touched on some of the implications for education practice as I see them. In this section I will make more focused recommendations for those who interact with young children through art experience. I have not separated recommendations for parents, early childhood and school teachers as I feel that the cross over between these contexts should be encouraged. As an art educator who is passionate about children's art experience, I found making recommendations was a bit like composing a 'wish list'. I do realise however, that not all wishes are possible in all situations, but I make them in the hope that they may just materialize.

### ***Provision of spaces and resources***

Children need dedicated art spaces and resources that are linked to their personal interests. While some experimentation with media is valid, good basic art materials are often more engaging than gimmicky materials. The 'feel' of these art spaces is more important than their physical attributes. These spaces should allow for children to be able to create, store, and revisit their art projects. These spaces should also allow for some work-in-progress without risk of having it being packed away by other people.

These creative art spaces need to be integrated into the social life of homes, early childhood centres and schools, while also allowing relatively uninterrupted engagement by individuals and groups. At home, as in education settings, there is a fine balance

between providing an aesthetically pleasing and visual stimulating environment, and allowing some level of 'messy' workshop environment.

### ***Understanding children's 'funds of knowledge' through art***

Children's visual images and verbal accounts not only provide valuable insights into the concepts they explore through their art, but potentially provides a connection to the rich funds of knowledge associated with home life. For all children, and especially those with learning or communication difficulties, this connecting bridge is vital in addressing disjunctions between home and preschool/school experience. Hedges (2007) also suggests that understanding and building on children's funds of knowledge has the potential to transform early childhood teaching-and-learning environments. This thesis has revealed the value in researchers and educators finding ways to dialogue with children about their self-initiated home-based art, the value of home-based visits and in finding ways to acknowledge the competences, experiences and interests that children do bring into educational settings.

### ***Art experience and ESOL children***

While drawings and illustrations have been used in other research projects to help immigrant and ESOL<sup>24</sup> children (for example see Astorga, 1999; Baghban, 2007; Peng, Fitzgerald, & Park, 2006), a focus on children's self-initiated and home-based drawings and art has yet to be fully explored. My interactions with Lee led me to believe that this is an aspect of research that could be explored more. Also, I believe that immigrant and ESOL children would benefit from teachers' patient and determined efforts to communicate about their art. Observations suggested that teacher-child interactions based around a child's art would be most productive if the child could be easily heard, had a patient listener, had regular and scheduled interactions with a teacher and was able to share those themes and ideas that they were most interested in. It was also my belief that some children, especially those who have difficulty forming close relationships with other children, would benefit from bringing favourite toys to early childhood centres so these could act as points of reference for children's interactions and negotiated understandings.

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<sup>24</sup> ESOL: English for Speakers of Other Languages.

## ***Regular drawing experiences based on child-initiated topics***

Spontaneous art expression is an important childhood phenomenon. While spontaneous art is not always experienced through drawing alone, in the addition to sheets of paper, the provision of blank drawing books at home, preschool and school would be beneficial for children. These books should be readily accessible, alongside suitable drawing implements. In my opinion, there should also be more than one book in use at any one time so the drawing book/s can move with the child between various environments. This would also allow some fluidity of time in terms of 'returning' books to the one location. Promoting the habit of regular drawing in books, as part of home, preschool or school routines, is beneficial for children, parents and teachers on many levels. These drawing books not only provide children with the many benefits of regular graphic experience, but may provide teachers and parents with insights into children's big ideas and funds of knowledge. This research also suggests that the book format encourages some children to develop complex drawing-narratives that have parallels with other forms of literacy development.

Children should be able explore their own ideas and to expand their big ideas through drawing. Furthermore, children should have some control over the drawings that they share publically and those that they keep private. If a child has a close relationship with parents, siblings and teachers these 'private' viewings are likely to include some others.

## ***Talking with children, listening and seeing***

In the early childhood or school setting we have to consider how our interactions with children might 'interfere with perception of the relation between undergoing and doing' (Dewey, 1934/2005, p. 46), that is between the children's art actions and their perceptions of these. For example, when teachers limit their responses to a child's art experience to classroom management issues, or to only the graphic features of the art (such as the line or colour), there is the potential to cause a disruption between a child's thinking and acting within art processes. They also risk interfering with a child's ongoing exploration of ideas when there is no link between home and early childhood experience, or when art materials are too complex, gimmicky or difficult to access. Likewise, forcing breaks in activity (which both early childhood and school systems often do) creates interference in the flow of an art experience that can make the artmaking event and outcomes seem incomplete and unsatisfying. However, I would not advocate that the

answer lies in teachers leaving children to their own devices and thoughts, for the social interaction that children have with adults is vital to children's co-constructions of social, cognitive and emotional developments. Therefore, I advocate that teachers make a conscious effort to talk with children about their art, to listen to their conversations about these, and to observe as they engaged in artmaking experiences. This leads me to my next point.

### ***Becoming an interested audience for children's talk about art***

Research processes revealed that through co-constructive interactions with interested adults, young children were able to discriminate between those artworks that they had completed, those that they wanted displayed, and those that were only ever works-in-progress. These discrimination skills are not unlike those skills involved in developing written language. Therefore, I believe there is value in allowing children to store their work, and in establishing habits where children share these with an interested audience on a regular basis. Digital photography can be a useful way to access and discuss artworks, but children also need access to their actual artworks if more work is to be done on them. Furthermore, there is scope for children to be more involved in making decisions about displayed and on-going work. Most importantly, adults can become an interested viewing and listening audience for children's art and for their talk about their art, and thereby help children to achieve their artistic goals.

### ***Expanding types and formats of art***

Children should have opportunities to explore a wider range of art formats. For example, in this research alone children made story books, created games and maps, explored designs and patterns, built wooden and cardboard constructions and used photography as an art medium. I recommend that parents and teachers examine more carefully what children are interested in when they produce art of various kinds and regard these as valid art expressions that could be supported and extended.

### ***Art as joint experience***

In this research children often created art with their siblings and parents at home and this contributed towards a sense of belonging and achievement. I believe that there is more scope for social interactions based around art in early childhood and school settings and for consciously building a sense of community through art experience. From

Dewey's (1934/2005) perspective all art experience is a 'remaking of the material of experience in the act of expression' and functions as a sign of a 'unified collective life' (p. 84). I suggest, therefore, that some provision should be made for children to collaborate on art projects and to understand how some artworks in their own and other cultures are collective works that have contributed towards community and ethnic identity.

### ***Collaborations, experts and novices***

A related point is that children need opportunities to be experts and to be novices in the realm of art experience. As noted in this research, children's collaborations with parents and siblings had positive effects on artistic development, attitudes, self-efficacy and competencies. In this study however, the early childhood and school settings appeared to be at either end of the child-as-expert and child-as-novice continuum. By this I mean, that in general, the early childhood centre needed to provide more opportunities for children to learn from experts, and the schools needed to provide more opportunities for the children to be the experts in aspects of art, and to teach others. Furthermore, the way that parents interacted with children provided some insights into models of ways teachers and children can collaborate through art and co-construct knowledge and understandings about art experiences. There were instances of playfulness and of collaborations between teachers and children. However, such collaborations require teachers and adults to have a good understanding of individual children's skills, interests and needs.

### ***Children's photography and photographs***

My experiences within this research have broadened my own understanding of the many ways in which children can use digital photography to enhance their experiences of art. It is my impression that while many homes, schools and centres have cameras these tend to be under-utilized as learning and creative tools for young children. Yet, in terms of art experiences, children can use cameras to record their artworks, to share their artworks with others and to create artworks. It is my belief that children's photography, as an expressive art medium, could be further developed in early childhood and primary levels.

Photographs of the children were also an important way for children, families and educators to share experiences and co-construct understandings. In this research, and in my experience, teachers in early childhood centres put enormous work into generating

preschool journals which featured photographs of the children engaged in various activities. However, these journals did not seem to be seen by the school. I recommend that schools make greater efforts to build on the evidence of learning and experience that children's art and preschool journals may provide. I also believe that there is value in continuing such practices into beginning school levels, for as Lee's mother pointed out, she had little idea of what her son actually learned at school. Furthermore, school children could be given more responsibility in creating these journals alongside their teachers and parents.

### ***Getting schools ready for children***

In this research it was clear that practices, such as school orientation visits, were in place to get children prepared for school. It was also apparent that once children did start school their teachers were caring, hardworking and supportive. However, the school orientation visits focused on what children and their parents could do to understand school life and provided no apparent focus on what schools could do, or had done, to prepare for specific children. Furthermore, the colouring-in and worksheet activities that the children engaged in at these sessions fell well below the children's capabilities and one child commented that the teachers did not seem to know how easy these activities were. I recommend that schools take this orientation opportunity to identify and respect the visual and graphic literacy skills that children already have, often in the form of drawing, and tap into these during these visits so children can share some of their know-how during these important occasions. There could also be provision for three-dimensional work with construction materials that could be photographed. These artworks and images would provide good starting points for teachers to get to know children and for children to be appreciated for what they have to offer.

### ***Supporting children's artistic risk taking***

Dewey (1934/2005) suggested that there are 'few esthetic experiences that are wholly gleeful' (p. 43) as there is a sense of undergoing 'struggle and conflict' (p. 42) as a means of developing and taking in the experience. Thus, while a satisfying and imaginative art experience is not always one of joyful experience, research observations revealed that when children persisted in the face of turmoil, they displayed a sense of accomplishment and, over time, allowed them to develop greater conceptual understandings about their art. Therefore, while children should be aware of the support

of others, I think these supporters should resist the urge to 'rescue' children when they are having difficulties. At the same time, I believe it is foolish to set up environments where the art making task is so complex that the pervading emotional quality for children is one of frustration or anger. Thus, I believe that children would benefit from supportive learning environments in which provision is made for them to take risks with their art.

## **Suggestions for further research**

This study provided insights into young children's art experiences across home, early childhood and school settings. The findings and recommendations suggest avenues of enquiry that are worthwhile pursuing and the following suggestions represent a range of research options:

- The replication of this research within other communities, ethnic groups or countries would generate some fresh insights into the way children experience art in other cultures and societies.
- Replication of this research could be undertaken with older children, as they transitioned between primary and secondary educational settings. This would provide a bigger picture of art experience over children's school life.
- A continuation of this research could be undertaken with one or more of the current research participants at a later date to track their subsequent art experiences and development.
- A similar study could be undertaken that specifically gathers data about teacher's experiences of art in early childhood and beginning school settings. Such a study would provide greater insights into teacher-learner relationships through art and assist in developing policy and practices for art education in the early years.
- The data gathered in this doctoral research, and presented in this thesis, are sufficiently rich to provide further analysis and multiple readings. Further study could be made, but is not limited to, analysis on: Gender issues and gendered identity through art; children's engagement in three-dimensional art media; children's artistic expression through decorative art styles; and children's art experiences in relation to theories of creativity and traits of creative people.
- Smaller scale investigations could focus on young children's understandings and practices associated with links between drawing, writing and numeracy; young children's art experiences with three-dimensional media and formats; children's use of

digital photography as an art medium; and children's use of drawing to communicate when English is not their only language.

- Action research projects could be based on implementation of some of these recommendations, such as provision of drawing books, dedicated art space and regular discussion with children about their art experiences. Such research would take this current study deeper into the realms of pedagogy, policy and practice.
- As this research demonstrates, much can be gained from acknowledging that children do have opinions, and that their activities, interests and concerns should be placed central to discussions involving the representation of children's rights and welfare. Not only can children's perspectives provide valuable insights for those who make decisions on behalf of children, but those scholars who seek to make sense of Deweyan perspectives, and Vygotskian sociocultural-historical perspectives may do so through meaningful engagement with young children.

## **Contributions, strengths and limitations**

### ***Contributions to the field***

Among other domains and fields of research, this study contributes towards knowledge advancement in early childhood education, primary level education, art and art education, teaching and learning, parenting, home-based learning, and aesthetic theory and education. It also contributes to insights into the NSW Australian curriculum and practices in early childhood and beginning school.

At a methodological level this research contributes towards arts-based methodologies, narrative inquiry, visual ethnography, and contemporary ethnographic studies. It also expands on collaborative research with young children, the use of cameras by children and the development of research relationships.

At a theoretical level this theory expands on research and theories in the field of art education and early childhood. This research, and the articles and presentations arising from it, contribute towards the growing field of international research in art in early childhood. This work also contributes to Deweyan and Vygotskian sociocultural-historical perspectives and research as understood in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## ***Strengths of the study***

The strengths of this study include the methods and models employed to access children's perspectives; the re-presentation of children's perspectives through narratives; children's comments and children's photographs; the longitudinal focus; collaborative involvement with children and their families; and interaction with children in their own homes and across early childhood and school settings.

An in-depth analysis of visual and verbal data, as narratives of children's experience, was one of the strengths of this research. In addition, such data was rich, complex and open to future analysis.

A further strength of this research was the carefully considered, implemented and documented ethical practices surrounding the development and maintenance of positive research relationships with young children and their families.

In terms of a longitudinal ethnographic study, four participants was an optimum number to work with as larger numbers would have significantly diluted the richness of insights into individual experiences.

Likewise, the photographs had high value as research data and as points of mutual reference for participants and researcher. They were strengths of the study because they were taken by the child-participants, or (to a much lesser extent) by the researcher in a context familiar to the participants; because they were shared between researcher and participant on a regular basis in the participant's home; because the sharing of photographs was controlled by the children and included their verbal commentaries; and because there was a relatively short time frame between taking and talking about photographs and such activities were undertaken on a regular basis and in an ethical manner.

Amongst other findings this research brings new perspectives and understanding about children's experiences in terms of: the nature of spontaneous art; their big ideas; their art-related funds of knowledge; interactions and collaborations with parents and siblings through art; digital photography as an artistic medium; artistic repertoires; artistic development, communication with, through and about art; and mismatches between home, school and preschool art experiences.

Amongst other findings this research brings new perspectives and understanding about teachers' experiences of teaching children art; art provisions in an early childhood centre; art-related activities in classrooms; flow of children's art experiences between

home, preschool and school; and children's perceptions of learning outcomes and relevance.

### ***Limitations of the study***

Sample size: The research was limited by the size of the sample in terms of generalisation to larger populations.

Data: The digital data, in the form of photographs and recorded conversations with young children, were complex. It was not practical or useful to transcribe the conversations as young children could be difficult to understand unless the listener also experienced the conversation. Therefore, this type of research data was not easily shared with others outside of the immediate research experience. As such, it was not conducive to the researcher getting administrative support in sorting, filing or transcribing research data. Working with electronic visual data also generated very large files. Storing and working with large chunks of electronic data required fast performing computers, suitable computer programmes and external hard drive storage devices for back up files. Over the course of this current research, my computer required upgrading as increasingly complex and large electronic files outstripped the capacity of the hardware. Such possibilities needed to be factored into the research budget.

Time commitments: Aligning children's conversations with their photographs and keeping records of sufficient depth so that such data could be retrieved at a later date was an ongoing time-consuming, challenging and exacting task. These sorts of tasks could not be done in short bursts but instead required sustained periods of time. Therefore one of the limitations of this study was that it required substantial time commitment. This research was also time-demanding in terms of visiting four children in their homes, preschool and schools. These visits needed to fit around other people's agendas so patience and flexibility was required. This was possible in this research but limits application of similar methodologies to part-time studies.

### **Concluding comments**

This thesis explored the nature of children's art experiences from their perspectives. Through visual ethnographic involvement in four children's lives, and an understanding of Dewey's (1934/2005) philosophies on art as experience, I have come to appreciate that:

- Children's art experiences transform their physical, social, cultural and personal worlds.
- Art is both a social and personal endeavour. Children explore social and personal identity through art.
- Children experience art within an environment of people, events and objects. Interactions within this environment influence and mediate how children experience art. Children's art experiences and artworks contribute towards evolving social and cultural environments.
- Art experience involves children who are present in current time, while having a history and sense of their future.
- Children explore big ideas through their art.
- When children are engaged in artistic-esthetic experience they are engaged in both artistic actions and perceptions that inform each other. It is these connections that allow for children to have satisfying and aesthetically fulfilling art experiences.

As I travel back in memory to the beginning of this research journey I realise that the children's art experiences have also transformed my understanding of these children, art, childhood and myself as an artist, researcher and teacher. I now hold even more strongly the conviction that art is a core human experience that adds greater depth and meaning to life's experiences. To paraphrase Dewey (1934/2005, p. 26), children's art was 'concrete proof' that children also used 'the materials and energy of nature with intent to expand' their own lives. Art experiences matter in the lives of children.

