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Dialogic Drawing: A Method for Researching Abstract Phenomenon in Early Childhood

Profiling Emerging Research Innovations

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Abstract

This article explores the theoretical, ethical, and practical opportunities and constraints considered in the methodological design and use of Dialogic Drawing, a participatory method for accessing qualitative data with young children. The method was designed to gather data about abstract phenomena from young children, as part of a larger study investigating the impact of discursive affordances in the first year of compulsory school in Western Australia. Methodological findings are reported from the application of Dialogic Drawing with 28 five-year-old children from diverse school-based semiotic landscapes in the Perth metropolitan area in Western Australia. Three strands of analysis are described and critiqued: drawn product, drawing process, and approach to drawing. Thematic analysis of drawn visual schema, dialog and embodied behaviours highlights the potential reach of Dialogic Drawing for interdisciplinary research significant to early childhood. The participating children revealed they perceive drawing as the child's domain, endorsing Dialogic Drawing as a relevant and accessible method with capacity to gain untapped information significant to qualitative researchers seeking to elicit the authentic perspectives of children.

Keywords

emerging research innovations – dialogic – drawing – early childhood – participatory
– children's voice – visual pedagogy

1 Introduction

In early childhood education and research, the intrinsic power relationship between adults and children is undergoing a cultural shift. Child agency has emerged as a crucial characteristic of childhood (Department of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations, 2009) and the right of a child to have a voice on matters that directly affect them is now widely accepted (Murray, 2019). Methodology for research in early childhood continues to move toward participatory methods that work with children to empower their contributions to the research process (Eckhoff, 2019).

Children's views remain marginalized despite advances in research with young children (Murray & Rudolph, 2019). For the contributions of children to continue to gain traction, innovative methods must be developed beyond unilateral approaches such as adult observation or child narrative. The diverse socio-cultural dynamic of childhood is complex in its construction (Leinhardt, 2019) and warrants methods for research that have capacity to gather rich data for the disentanglement of abstract phenomenon. In early childhood, children communicate multi-modally using developing vocabulary and linguistic skills, embodied behaviours, and simple drawn schema (Wright, 2015). Participatory methods should therefore prioritize accessibility, and consider the children's understanding and scope to express their views (Mayne et al, 2018). Furthermore, dialogic exchanges with children should be supported democratically (Torraz-Gomez et al, 2019) through communicative processes that augment their contributions and perspectives about complex abstract phenomenon (Pascal, 2019).

In this article, Dialogic Drawing is presented as an accessible participatory method endorsed by children as synchronous with 'what children do'. The method draws from Giddens's understandings of social theory and the role of democratic dialog (2013) in the design of contexts for shared agency between children and adults in research. Methods for data collection and analysis processes are described, and then discussed through Gibson's theoretical lens of affordances (1977), considering the demand characteristics of the Dialogic Drawing event. The analysis draws from the original study for which Dialogic Drawing was designed that investigates children's perspectives of discursive affordances in early childhood.

2 Literature Review

2.1 *Listening to Children in Research*

The credibility of children's voices remains challenged, and their views largely marginalized and undervalued in research in Australia (Walsh et al., 2017). There is also little evidence of the impact of children's voices upon educational policy in Australian politics and education (Page & Tayler, 2016). Internationally, the credibility of children's voices has been evidenced by a growing repository of children's insights into their experiences of childhood and early learning, through use of visual and dialogic methods (e.g., Einarsdóttir et al., 2019; White, 2020). Children's voices provide a mirror for adult reflection upon the impact of their decision-making for children (Ruscoe, 2021). The fundamental rights of children to be heard and respected, are dependent upon a shift in adult beliefs that recognize children's perspectives are relevant to policy review and reform (Pedersen & Bang, 2016).

Giddens (2013) posits that democratic dialog is a socio-political instrument of change. Democratic dialog requires that all voices be included, including those of children, to enhance their agency as citizens and facilitate an active role in social transformation (Torraz-Gomez et al., 2019). Dobson (2014) applies a practical lens, reminding that dialog must value speaking and listening equally to be considered democratic, and that free deliberation of ideas necessarily requires close listening. In the context of the nuanced child-centric multi-modal communications of early childhood, the use of a democratic approach to dialog in research holds capacity to generate a sensitive, responsive context through which adult comprehension can be reached and the credibility of children's perspectives enhanced. The use of a dialogic component supports adult researchers to cross power-laden boundaries of 'adult' or 'child' and of 'speaker' or 'listener' and learn the depths of children's knowledge, ideas, and perspectives.

The positioning of power during research events affects the reliability of what a researcher can capture and is a key consideration in the design of participatory research with young children (White, 2021). The international Ethical Research Involving Children [ERIC] project (ERIC, 2013) highlights that the attitudes, beliefs, values, and assumptions of researchers are pivotal in shaping the possibility of what may be offered, or afforded, to children in research. Pedersen and Bang (2016) remind what is afforded to children is also negotiated by children as agents of their own decisions, who exercise agency in their decisions to continue to assent to participate and to conform with the demands of the methodology throughout the research process. Just as child agency is recognized in participatory approaches to learning (Ärlemalm-Hagsér

& Sandberg, 2017; Walsh et al., 2017), it is also key to participatory research (Eckhoff, 2019). Child agency balances power and resolves ethical issues for researchers when child-centric contexts are used democratically to leverage authentic multi-modal avenues for communication.

2.2 *Power and Affordance in School-Based Research*

In school-based contexts for research, the power differential between adults and children is fraught with ethical implications when considered through the lens of affordance (Heydon et al., 2016). Gibson (1977) explains affordance as the freedoms and restraints that may be offered in the events, objects, and environments of an individual, holding implications for both children and adults in the context of research. The school environment of a child is a semiotic landscape steeped in contextualized power relationships between child and educator, who are also bound by the affordances of the discourses to which they draw their knowledge, beliefs, and values (Ruscoe, 2021). In addition, curriculum and policy demand teachers meet mandated requirements that influence what a child may be afforded in the school context, with implications for what research schools may feel enabled to consent to, and how a child may ultimately perceive their role in participatory research. The interplay of these forces generates opportunities and imposes constraints that require consideration in the design of research methods that seek to legitimize children's perspectives. In such a complex dynamic, the ethical underpinnings of research with young children must be transparent and rigorously upheld to protect the integrity of the children's views and their right to contribute (Coady, 2020; Dockett & Perry, 2019).

2.3 *The Rise of Dialogic Methods in Early Childhood*

Researchers in the field of early childhood education have acknowledged the agentic nature of children and pioneered broad ranging, almost exclusively qualitative methodologies, for ethical research with children (e.g., Sargeant et al., 2015; Zakaria et al., 2020). Participatory methodologies have become ubiquitous, ranging from consulting with children to children being given a degree of autonomy over the direction of the research. Increasingly, methods adopt the use of a visual mediation tool for discussion, for example, photography, map making and other creative activities (e.g., Fane et al., 2018; White, 2020) or garner responses prompted by photos, environments, and vignettes (e.g., Birch, 2018). However, interviewing children using semi-structured interview schedules remains a central component in many research projects with young children (Brooker, 2020), often supported by one or more complementary sources for multiple listening (Tan, 2019) and triangulated to verify the children's contributions. Complementary sources include anecdotal

observation (e.g., Lawrence, 2019), oral and written journals and group interviews (e.g., Alexandre et al., 2021), and the use of narrated drawing (Bland, 2018; Søndergaard & Reventlow, 2019).

Dialogic methods are evolving from traditional semi-structured interviews to capture more authentic exchanges and neutralize power through shared control of the dialog (Ruscoe, 2021). Semi-structured interviews position the adult as director of dialog, where their responses to children necessarily alter and pursue a predetermined dialogic direction. This has implications in the context of research with very young children whose linguistic communication is limited by time and exposure (Fellowes & Oakley, 2019). White (2022) observes the unique utterance chains of young children who approximate deeply contextualised words and phrases, punctuated by embodied expression, to comprise inter-connected meaning-making. Analysis of children's dialogic processes in research reveal children's propensity for "speculation, contemplation, discernment, reflection, and desire to engage in and direct thinking in response to stimulus" (p.1). Dialogic methods offer space for sensitivity to the unique dialogic and multi-modal communications of young children and for spontaneous thinking in response to research questions to unfold (Pascal, 2019). Descriptions of shared contexts for sustained thinking as a mechanism for metacognitive thinking (Siraj-Blatchford and Asani, 2015) are significant to researchers seeking to design contexts for dialog suitable for investigating abstract phenomena. Methods that include drawing have been cited to cultivate a sustained context for shared dialog, metered at the child's pace (Alford, 2015). Drawing methods have also been found to support high engagement for young children, facilitating extended, authentic, child-centric responses (Bland, 2018; Søndergaard et al., 2019), suggesting a natural synergy between dialog and drawing for research purposes.

3 Method

The qualitative perspectives gained from young children have been viewed by some as 'soft' or untrustworthy data (Pham, 2018). This challenge was central to designing a reliable and rigorous method to evidence the validity of children's contributions. Ongoing reports of the capacity of drawing to sustain engagement (e.g., Zakaria et al., 2020) prompted the use of drawing as a child-centric, familiar context for supporting dialogic exchanges. Drawing served to create a tangible child-directed reference point from which dialog could be co-constructed, which acknowledged the unique utterance chains and embodied expression typical of early childhood (White, 2022), and emancipated the children's right to be heard (UN, 1989) without compromising the research aims.

3.1 *Dialogic Drawing*

Dialogic Drawing is defined as a participatory method whereby children engage in dialog with the researcher, using the drawing process as both a response and a prompt to explore the research questions. Ideas are communicated multi-modally, through drawing, verbal utterances, and embodied behaviours in a social dynamic comfortable and familiar to the child. Power to direct and extend dialog is shared between adult and child through the demands imposed and accommodated by child participant as holder of the drawing, and researcher as holder of the research question. The researcher works to neutralise power through adoption of a democratic mindset, where the child is afforded silences for drawing and dialogic space for elaboration and deliberation of ideas to their satisfaction. The researcher is afforded opportunity to expand upon the drawing prompt to properly investigate the research question.

Individual child participants are invited to draw their views and ideas in response to a verbal prompt in a location where the semiotic landscape (symbolic attributes of the environment in which the method is used) is considered in relation to the purposes of the research. The event is recorded digitally to capture the child's multi-modal expression, allowing the researcher to gather nuanced data through later observation and transcription.

Dialogic Drawing is designed to facilitate shared conduits of meaning-making relevant to both the research questions and the child's communicative intent. This is important so that abstract concepts can be understood through a cyclic process of respectful listening, pausing for the enactment of drawing, verbal and non-verbal prompts from the researcher (e.g., comments, queries, facial expression and pointing), and clarification of the children's representations and comments. The method provides space for adjustment to the pace, language, and direction of the event to be respectfully set by the child, offsetting any inadvertent pressure on the child (Mayne et al., 2018). The child's tempo is adopted by the researcher, who is perceptive of the child's attitude and approach during the research event and mirrors their ebb and flow harmoniously to capture comfortable moments for sensitive interrogation as they arise.

3.2 *Context for Using Dialogic Drawing*

The findings shared in this article have been drawn from a study which used Dialogic Drawing as a method to investigate child perceptions and experiences of discursive affordances in the first year of compulsory school in Western Australia. Children providing assent were invited to engage in Dialogic Drawing with the researcher individually in their classroom setting, but without other

children or the teacher present, so that their own perspectives could be ascertained without interruption or interference from their peers (Higgins, 2012). The children were asked to draw their response to the prompt: "Draw something you don't do at school now, but you think would be good for children to do at school. You can draw more than one thing if you like". The drawing prompt enabled children to provide their own perspectives of what they believed children should be afforded in their first year of compulsory school, based on the realities of their lived experience. The event was recorded and the dialog later transcribed alongside their completed drawings and anecdotal references to embodied expression.

The researcher was a visitor to the class, unknown to the children. Establishing trusting relationships with children is generally recommended for participatory research with young children (Eckhoff, 2019). However, in this instance, the absence of a personal relationship with the children added trustworthiness to the data. Zakaria et al. (2020) explain children come to research events with anticipation of what information the researcher might be seeking or a desire to maintain an ongoing relationship through pleasing the adult. The children in this study were not affected by the demands an ongoing relationship with an adult researcher may impose, nor limited by knowledge of the adult's views. Ethics approval was obtained from both Edith Cowan University Ethics Committee (Approval no: 20549) and the Western Australian Department of Education (Reference no: D19/0503524).

3.3 *Qualitative Analysis of Dialogic Drawing*

The transcriptions of the children's Dialogic Drawing were analysed to understand what the children perceived they were afforded or believed they should be afforded in the first year of compulsory school. The drawings provided telling artefacts for analysis, steeped in aesthetic elements and processes that reinforced and added integrity to the dialog. The drawn artifact was controlled by the child but found to be fluid in nature, leading with ideas for representation, but adjusted in response to the evolving dialog with the researcher. The drawing process provided opportunity for children to traverse several ideas for analysis, both in what they represented in their drawing and their responses and explanations of elements of their drawings. The children's attitude toward these elements, as they were drawn or explained, was also analysed as an indication of how they were perceived and prioritised. Analysis was organized into three strands: *drawn product*, *drawing process*, and *approach to drawing* which will now be described.

3.4 *Analysis of the Drawn Product*

Analysis of the *drawn product* was the first strand of analysis and necessarily drew upon accompanying dialog and embodied behaviours to ascertain what was being represented and the drawer's intended meaning. There were significant differences in the children's emerging ability to abstractly visualize ideas and objects and translate these into recognisable drawn schema. In children's drawing, schema can be understood as an invented or borrowed system of lines and shapes used to represent things known to them (Wright, 2011). The children's drawn schema, often ambiguous during formation, served as a powerful entry point for the researcher to prompt further explanation and clarify raw content and associated detail as it was depicted.

The drawn product was also analysed as a composition, with consideration given to what elements were focal points, the use or lack of colour for different elements, the size and proportion of different elements in relation to one another, where they were positioned spatially on the page, and the degree of elaboration attributed to different drawn elements. For example, one child drew a representation of themselves sitting on the mat in front of the teacher, in the bottom corner of the page, using only dark blue and brown. Consideration of the child's use of art elements and principles, such as dark colours and diminutive proportion of figures in relation to the building could be interpreted as depicting insignificance or withdrawal (Figure 1). The accompanying dialog and embodied communication clarified the child felt anxious about school, having expected it would afford a quieter environment and recommended a calmer context for learning.

For each Dialogic Drawing event, the content portrayed, and aesthetic significance of aspects of the drawings, were verified through cross analysis of the dialog and the child's inclination toward each element as they were drawn. This first strand of analysis surfaced what the children may consider important and assisted in establishing themes about children's affordances for further analysis in NVivo. Thick description of the children's views of these thematic ideas were then added through analysis of their *drawing process* and *approach to drawing*.

3.5 *Analysis of the Drawing Process*

The *drawing process* was analysed to understand the children's ideas as they unfolded in the drawing event. This included the process through which the child's ideas were conceptualized from the research prompt, which sometimes took several minutes and numerous iterations of ideas before the child settled on what would be depicted. The children were found to undertake the drawing process as either a *singular, linear, cumulative, or compounding* process, each

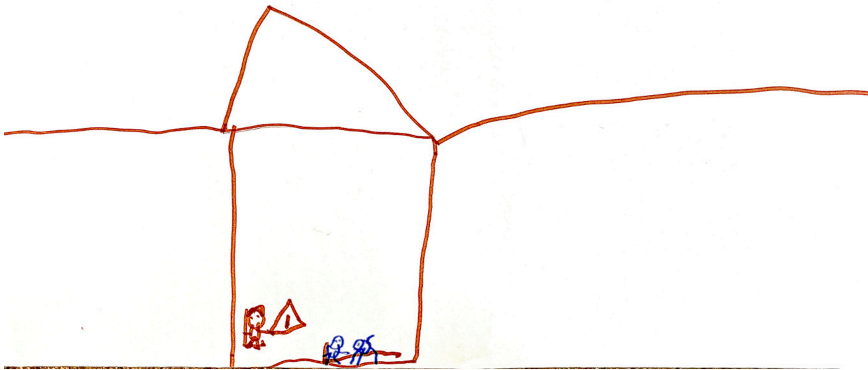


FIGURE 1 Analysis of composition in relation to dialog revealed child anxiety about noise levels at school

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providing different insights into the child's way of thinking and understanding the research prompt. Some children drew singular schema for their response such as a drawing of a Lego® construction (Figure 2). Others drew a sequence of unrelated schema representing several disparate responses in a linear or scattered fashion (Figure 3). In other instances, ideas were cumulative, all linking to the same idea, for example, multiple elements in nature play or many components of an indoor classroom setting (Figure 4). Children adopting a compounding process grew small ideas into bigger ideas through elaboration and imagination, for example drawing a tree which became a treehouse which became a trap they planned to build in the nature play area (Figure 5).

The sequence of marks made by the children and the time and investment attributed to each element of their drawing was significant for identifying what might be of particular importance to the child. For example, some drawings gathered momentum, particularly where the drawings compounded, culminating in the most important idea, while others lost momentum as the child's ideas became less fervent and were eventually exhausted during linear and cumulative processes. The time spent on each element was an indication

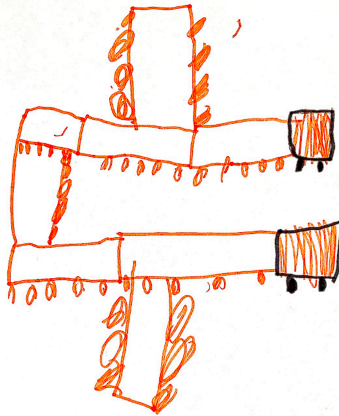


FIGURE 2 Singular process: Lego construction

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of what the child prioritized, and was frequently accompanied by lengthy pauses from drawing, physical enactment of ideas, or detailed elaboration of the drawing, during which associated dialog was expanded and emphasised. These pauses for expansion in the drawing process were observed to be climactic decision points where the child would either springboard into an extended period of drawing or consider their drawing complete.

3.6 *Analysis of the Approach to Drawing*

The children's *approach to drawing* was found to hold expository and/or narrative elements. Some children approached the research prompt from an informative perspective, documenting recommendations and reporting events to justify them. This approach was marked by schema of real objects and events and the children's dialogic tone typically held a sense of authority. In contrast, other children approached the drawing task from a place of possibility and wonder, narrating the emergence of idealistic imaginings as they were drawn, and tall tales of what they wished could be. The direct speech of drawers using either approach was also a feature for analysis as it provided insight into what

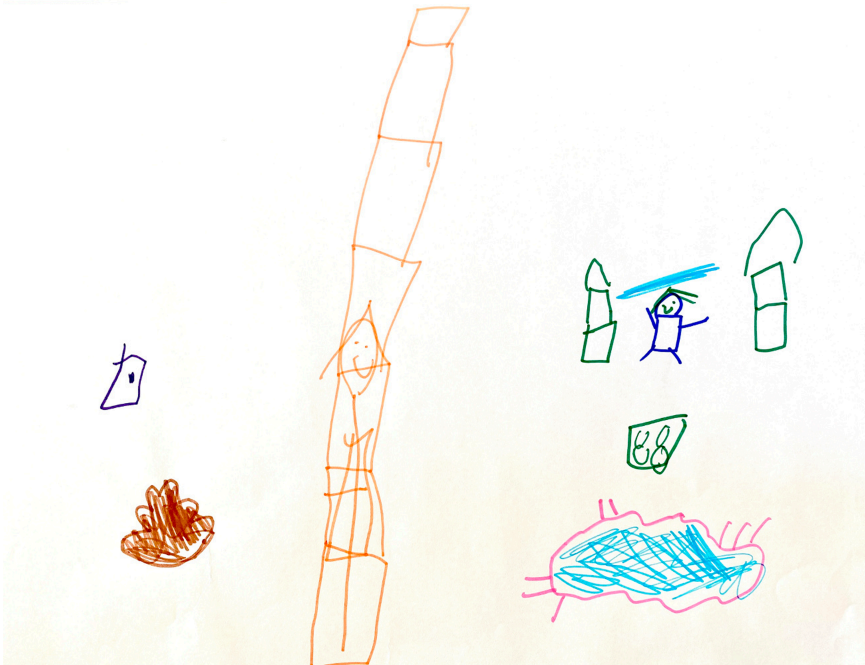


FIGURE 3 Linear process: box construction, a pond, and “dirty hands”

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the children expected the participants in their scenarios would be thinking or feeling about the affordances they described. For example, in the telling of both real and imagined events, the children frequently used direct speech to communicate what they perceived or observed the teacher, or their peers would say in response to what they were or could be afforded. Inner speech (Vygotsky cited in Emerson, 1983) was also noted to occur during the drawing event as the children transcended their drawing. They sometimes flowed in and out of the character roles of the participants in their drawings. For example, one child (a refugee) told a story of themselves rescuing many people from a disaster and transporting them to “doctor school” (Figure 6).

A doctor... a doctor school ... and we'll need the heli-land... somebody just killed ... “beep, beep, beep, beep, beep – it’s an emergency”. The helicopter will take off and he says, “somebody just killed” (in deep voice like this) ... that is the button to make people loud... and this is the bell screamed like this – “one, two, three” and the end that would be this one – “beep, beep, beep, beep”.



FIGURE 4 Cumulative process: “Things in my classroom that kids should have”
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Analysis of the narrative and expository approaches adopted provided insight into the multiple ways in which the children valued different objects and events in their drawings, for example, as practical, playful, worrying, or joyful.

Observations arising from analysis of process and approach were added to the themes in NVivo that were surfaced through the initial analysis of the drawn product. These observations brought thick description to the themes in the form of representative words, phrases, brief annotations and quotations.

3.7 *Potential Reach of Dialogic Drawing for Researching Abstract Phenomenon*

The transcriptions of the children’s Dialogic Drawing were analysed by undertaking thematic analysis using NVivo software to understand what the children perceived they were afforded or believed they should be afforded in the first year of compulsory school. Thematic analysis highlighted the potential reach of Dialogic Drawing to examine diverse abstract phenomenon, including the child’s sense of identity and self-perception, gender bias and dominance amongst children, children’s pedagogical opinions and recommendations,

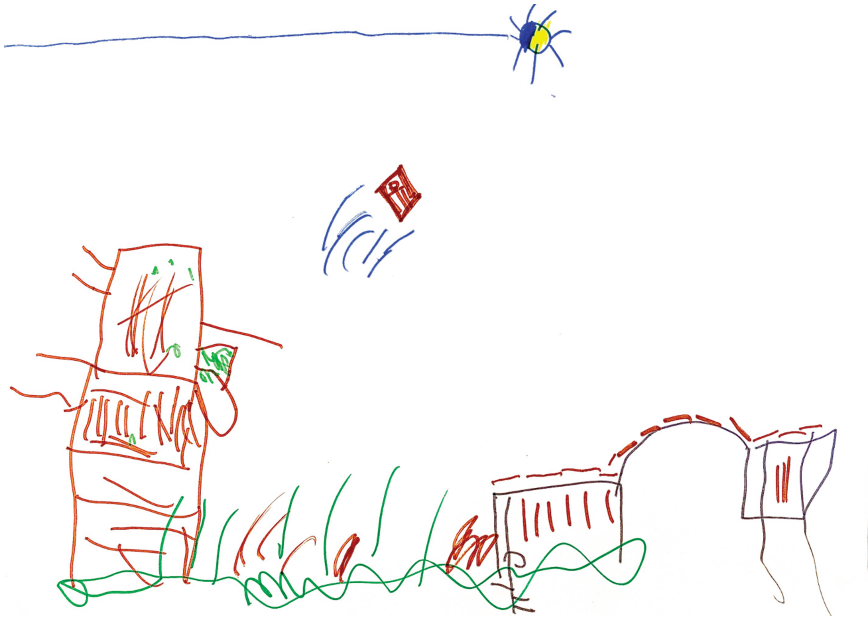


FIGURE 5 Compounding process: "It's a tree... it's a tree-house... it's a trap"

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influences upon children's wellbeing and motivation, and the influence of adult beliefs and values communicated to children. The children also discussed the drawing process itself, describing drawing as a scaffold for communicating and learning from one another, and a child-centric platform for social learning, and self-assessment.

4 Discussion

The following discussion uses Gibson's theoretical understanding of affordance (Gibson, 1977) to consider the demands embedded in Dialogic Drawing as a research event. Discussion of these demands fortifies the trustworthiness of the children's contributions, raises caution about the potential impact of the contextual environment upon reliability, and brings greater understanding to the dynamics of dialogic communication for empowerment of both adult researcher and child participant in research. The demand for an accessible child-centric method in early childhood research is also discussed.



FIGURE 6 Example of an imaginative approach to drawing supported by directed speech: “Doctor school”
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4.1 *Fortifying the Trustworthiness of Children’s Contributions*

Dialogic Drawing was designed to be an ethical method to uphold children’s rights (UN, 1989) and fortify the trustworthiness of their contributions. Gibson theorizes *events*, *objects*, and *environments* hold demand characteristics which influence what may be afforded to the participants that interact with and within them (1977). Gibson’s theory of demands and how they afford a response is a useful lens for testing the integrity of power dynamics embedded in the method of Dialogic Drawing, and for verifying whether children’s rights are ethically observed.

In the context of Dialogic Drawing, the research *event* was characterized by the demand imposed by the drawing prompt, an adult demand to instigate dialog relevant to the research question. Maintaining awareness of the children’s vulnerability to adult demands was central to the method which sought to avoid positioning children as other than adult (Birch, 2018), risk exploitation (Coady, 2020) or coerce through power-laden adult-centric demands (Sargeant & Gillett-Swan, 2015). Dialogic Drawing balanced the power of the

adult imposed drawing prompt by affording children agency to make choices about how to voice and express their perspectives. The *event* of drawing and the *objects* embedded within the drawing were empowering to the child who 'held the pen' and placed their own demands on the direction of the dialog and the pace and linguistic complexity of the dialogic exchange. In this way, the child was democratically engaged as an agentic, knowledgeable, intelligible informant.

Sharing power between adult and child required sensitivity from the researcher who encountered diversity in the children's preparedness to take control of the drawing process. Beilock et al. (2017) state children may experience symptoms of performance anxiety, such as apprehension and worry, due to uncertainty or perceived inability to meet the requirements of a task. In this study, twenty-five percent of children sought permission to draw their ideas, or reassurance before committing to drawing. In some instances, the children were apologetic about perceived 'mistakes' or asked for indications of approval such as asking, "will I get a tick for this?" (Figure 7).

Recalibrating child expectations of power roles in research is inherently challenging. Franks (2021) found young children clarify their dependence upon adults when establishing relationships to ensure their needs can be met. An unexpected strength of the method was the unaffected authenticity of the children's contributions, unbiased by knowledge of the researcher or their views, or the need to build a relationship which may be compromised by dependence upon the adult. This parameter positions Dialogic Drawing as a viable alternative to other approaches to hermeneutic phenomenological research in early childhood that prioritize ethnography supported by relationships to explore lived experience alongside children (e.g., Aras, 2016).

4.2 *Using the Contextual Environment to Build Reliability*

Gibson observed the demand of the contextual *environment* holds power to influence what will be afforded by an *event* (1977). Therefore, in research events prompting response to stimulus, the participants' semiotic exposure needs to be considered. Eckert (2019) proposes the semiotic landscape is a socially constructed system of meaning, and that individuals in the landscape are contributing variables to how a semiotic landscape will be perceived. In the context of Dialogic Drawing events, the semiotic landscape includes objects in the physical environment, the pace of the event, and socio-emotional or intellectual messaging with potential to influence the child's perception and response to the research question.

The semiotic landscape also included the demands of the contextual environment from which the child had been withdrawn to participate in the

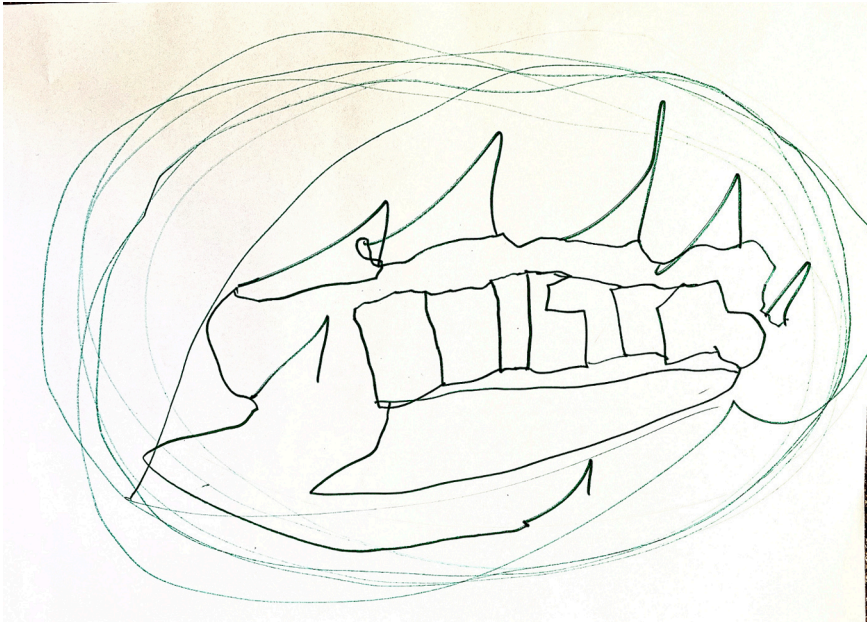


FIGURE 7 Children may expect and seek reassurance from adults: “Will I get a tick for this?”
 RUSCOE, A. (2021). *POWER, PERSPECTIVE, AND AFFORDANCE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION*. [HTTPS://RO.ECU.EDU.AU/THESES/2490](https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses/2490). REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION.

drawing. Folque (2020) suggests the sociocultural context and suggestive elements in the contextual environment place subliminal demands upon children’s responses. It was noted in this study that, in some instances, the children did draw from their localized semiotic landscape for inspiration (Figure 8). Furthermore, the length of time and depth of discussion each child was prepared to spend drawing was influenced by the contextual environment the child was leaving or returning to. The timing and location for Dialogic Drawing is a methodological opportunity for researchers to enhance reliability, by conducting research in a semiotic landscape that prompts authentic situated thinking relevant to research questions.

Children communicate meaning multi-modally (Hacket & Rautio, 2019). The unique communication of young children forms part of the contextual *environment* and demands a method that will afford opportunity for multi-modal expression. Dialogic Drawing fosters the creation of a drawing that is punctuated by contextualised embodied expressions and utterances of the child. Contemporary research with young children emphasizes the importance of extra-linguistic multi-modal literacies beyond speech (e.g., Leigh, 2020; Hilippo et al., 2016; Søndergaard & Reventlow, 2019; Zakaria et al.,

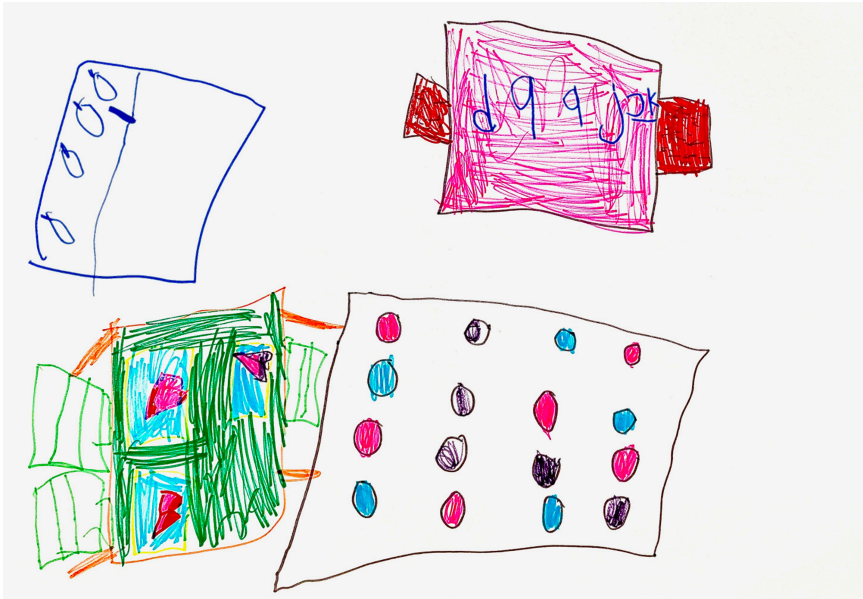


FIGURE 8 Children may draw from their semiotic field: whiteboard, smartboard, mat with dots for children to sit on and a writing desk for small group work
 RUSCOE, A. (2021). *POWER, PERSPECTIVE, AND AFFORDANCE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION*. [HTTPS://RO.ECU.EDU.AU/THESES/2490](https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses/2490). REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION.

2020). Dialogic Drawing is bolstered by the communication process of serve and return whereby both child and adult engage in cyclical exchanges until a shared understanding is reached (Distefano et al., 2020). This process is neurologically beneficial and rewards both the child and adult through compounding iterations of feeling understood (Siraj-Blatchford & Asani, 2015). The adult also gains increasing confidence in their interpretation of the child's utterances, promoting an ethical culture of shared understanding beyond simply gathering information about children's perspectives and ideas.

4.3 *Accessibility and Authenticity of Dialogic Drawing for Research with Children*

Dialogic Drawing could be considered a methodological refinement of Einarsdóttir's drawn narratives (2011), which capture young children's propensity for inner speech (Vygotsky, cited in Emerson, 1983) and verbalisation of imagined conversations (Honeycutt, 2022) as they draw. Dialogic Drawing introduces the adult voice to the narrative, to target and explore abstract phenomenon. Rather than a narration, the drawings that emerge become shared reference points for dialogic meaning-making. Wright (2015) explains children

are afforded a holistic method of meaning-making and expression through drawing, using the semiotic freedom of child-centric communication. Wright also notes the capacity for drawing to emancipate children's thinking on their own terms. This was noted during the Dialogic Drawing events, during which the children exhibited agency over content, pace, elaboration, colour, style, and assessment of completion. As aspects of their drawings emerged, they were used as tangible points for mutual interrogation, with the child demanding the researcher listen and observe with acuity to reach shared understanding.

The nature and extent of children's references to drawing warrants mention. Alford asserts that drawing is a desirable experience for young children (2015). The children's investment and ambition to draw was also evident in the study. Several children kept drawing even after the researcher attempted to bring closure to the event after an extended period. The children's endorsement of drawing brings further justifications to Dialogic Drawing as a credible method for research in early childhood.

5 Conclusion

This article explored the methodological design and application of Dialogic Drawing as a innovation upon existing participatory methods. The method's strength was its democratic approach which leveraged child agency through adoption of child-centric multi-modal communication of early childhood, and enriched adult comprehension, refining the researcher's capacity to rigorously investigate abstract phenomenon. Gibson's affordance theory was used to examine the integrity of the method, illuminating opportunities for researchers to fortify the trustworthiness of children's voices and bring reliability to data through consideration of the demands of events, objects, and environments. The method was found to empower and legitimise children's contributions, positioning them justly as citizens with rights and agency.

Implementation of Dialogic Drawing revealed the method's efficacy and accessibility for children. Thematic analysis highlighted the potential reach of Dialogic Drawing to examine children's perspectives on broad-ranging issues relevant to early childhood research, including identity, gender, wellbeing, transitions, and engagement. The children revealed their affinity with drawing in early childhood as part of their 'being' a child, adding weight to the method's suitability through the child's lens. The trustworthiness and reliability of the children's voices in this study, bolstered through rigorous, ethically designed methodology and analysis processes make a strong case for the contributions of children to be regarded as critical evidence in the design of policy for children.

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