Introduction to the Second Edition

Drawing in a Digital Age

This twenty-first-century edition of our late twentieth-century book about drawing with kids begins with a twenty-first-century child.

Over thirty years have passed since we began collecting drawings for the first edition of this book. During the intervening time the world has changed in many incredible ways for the late twentieth-century children that it portrays. They could not have imagined that their dozen or so television stations would multiply to hundreds, that the CB radios through which their heroes communicated would become ubiquitous cell phones, that many of the fantastic things they only imagined would become reality. If images from the media are the raw material from which children form their own visions and versions of the world, imagine the vastly greater number of images they encounter today than they did three decades ago. Not only television, film and the internet, but wonderfully complex video games provide them with characters, settings, actions, and challenges that overshadow many of the simpler narratives of the earlier publication.

And what of drawing? Do twenty-first century children still need the old-fashioned graphic means of recording the worlds they actually live in, imagining the worlds they might live in, and graphically fantasizing the worlds they could never live in? Has the old-fashioned process of marking directly on paper outlived its usefulness? With the advent of digital media that make it possible for children to photograph, scan, manipulate, and print images, and computer programs that make it possible to put into perspective view virtually any image or to plot human figures in almost any position and from any angle, it might seem as though we have entered a time when traditional drawing—where pencil and crayon are put to paper—is no longer as useful to children as it once was.

As we return to the issues we first raised three decades ago we believe that, if anything, drawing is more important to young people today than it was when this book was first published. Since the time of the first edition we have come to understand more fully the cultural, narrative, and playful foundations of children's drawings. Our insights into the many ways that adults might interact with children as they draw have become both more expansive and more subtle. We also have a greater understanding about the popular media's influence on children's drawings and how, rather than proving a detriment to children's drawing activities, the worlds depicted in the media provide children with a plethora of exciting material from which to build their own creations. Perhaps the most important new understanding, only anticipated in the first edition of this book, is the larger playful narrative context that provides the conditions for children's marvelous life-shaping drawings.

Three Major Drawing Sites

If creating realities/world-making-through-drawing was the central theme of *Teaching Children to Draw*, the alternate theme of adult/child interaction was and continues to be of equal importance. We pointed to the myriad ways parents, teachers, other interested adults and other kids shape the course of drawing development and its accompanying narrative competence—depending upon when and how they interact (or fail to interact) with kids as they draw and when and how they talk with kids about their drawings. We have come to view children's drawings and drawing activities as a vast and varied landscape. Within this terrain that we have observed for so many years we will point to three important drawing sites. The designation of these three sites has helped us to clarify many of the ideas presented in the first edition.

The three drawing sites are not merely places, but most importantly, they encompass such things as the motives and interactions that inform them. Contrast the conditions and motives when the child decides to make a drawing for her own satisfaction with the situation in which a teacher asks a classroom of students to make drawings of an assigned topic. One drawing episode is initiated by a child to please herself or himself; the second is initiated by an adult to meet an educational objective deemed important by the adult—but not necessarily by the students. When children initiate their own drawing activity for their own purposes, we call it the *first drawing site*. When adults assign children to draw, in schools or museums, we term it the *second drawing site*. When a child and an adult, for a period of time, set aside the status and authority that generally separate the realms of adulthood and childhood, when they become near equals and colleagues, and make joint contributions to a drawing we call it the *third drawing site.*

Amie Begins to Draw in the Third Site

As we further delineate these three drawing sites and the important distinctions among them, we will begin with Amie, her mother, and the technological and media worlds in which they live. When we wrote *Teaching Children to Draw* in the early 1980s, written text and images of children's drawing provided us, and others who wrote about children and their art, with the principal way to communicate our ideas. The computer had not yet become a fully-realized instrument for us and it was inconceivable that, in our lifetime, through something called the internet, we would not only communicate with someone or several someones on the other side of the world in an instant, but that ordinary people would be broadcasting their ideas and their lives to the world through blogs and a phenomenon called YouTube.

As we have said, this twenty-first-century edition of our late twentieth-century book about drawing with kids begins with a twenty-first-century child. Unlike the children in the original book, most of whom we met, interviewed, and with whom we often drew, we encountered Amie on the internet in a YouTube video. A blogger calling herself BrooklineMama had posted the video of her 2½-year-old daughter drawing a typical tadpole figure. What was most exciting was Amie's interaction with her mother and father, their questions, and Amie's drawing responses. (It was interesting to see that Amie's parents were interacting with her in ways similar to the ones we suggest in Chapter 3 of this book.)

Amie begins by drawing a somewhat circular shape and, off camera, her father asks, What is that? Amie decides that it is a head and accentuates the idea by strenuously adding two dots for eyes. Then she adds a tentative swirl beneath the "head" and having finished the drawing to her satisfaction, she begins to

Figure 1

Figure 2

Frames from the YouTube video of Amie at age 2 years, 7 months drawing *Figure with three heads*.

turn the page. Her mother, however, suggests that she "finish" the drawing before turning the page and asks, "What is that? the body?" Amie is agreeable and on request adds legs and arms, but balks at the feet for a few beats. Perhaps, as we describe in chapter three, according to the "territorial imperative" the 2½-year-old believes that there isn't enough space for feet at the bottom.

When asked to draw the mouth, however, Amie adds the mouth to the part designated by her parents as the body. So she is confused when the ever-logical parents wonder why she has put the mouth in the body and when the questioning continues in a quest for the head, Amie obligingly adds another circle, and declares it to be the head.

We think that the drawing-based interactions between Amie and her parents are prime examples of *third-site* drawing activity. In fact, this episode was preceded by dozens of other *third-site* encounters between Amie and her parents. Here are just a few of them.

At 17 months Amie observed her mother writing in her journal and asked if she could write too. Her mother allowed her to scribble on pages of her journal—implicitly acknowledging to Amie that her marking and her marks were as important as her mother's writing. From this point onward Amie's parents supplied her with pads of drawing paper, markers, pencils, and crayons. Until Amie turned three, nearly all of her drawing activities were encouraged by her parents and enthusiastically welcomed by Amie. Her motor control, which is quite exceptional, was facilitated even more by an interactive connect-the-dot game playfully engaged in by Amie and her father. Amie's father drew two dots and when she connected them, her parents cheered, and her father drew more dots. When Amie was 27-months-old her mother wrote in her blog "when she draws or paints she asks me to draw something too, I always respectfully decline for several reasons. I don't want to influence her lines with my perception of things, I don't want to impose my sense of realism on her, and in the end I like to have a drawing that is wholly hers. But then how will she see a drawing being made?" Her mother created a "Drawing Book for and with Amie" in which Amie's drawings of tadpole figures rest comfortably alongside her mother's colorful drawings of characters from some of Amie's children's books—and sometimes even superimposed

Figure 3
Amie, age 2 yrs., 7 mos. This drawing, a frame from the YouTube video, is a prime example of a *third-site* drawing activity.

Figure 4
Amie, age 17 mos. Amie's mother wrote in her blog, "This is her very first drawing, with a black roller pen in my Moleskine journal." Because her mother's journal-writing was a constant presence, Amie's "writing" was acknowledged as important in this third site.

themselves atop her mother's drawings. Nevertheless, as various *third-site* graphic activities were unfolding. Amie's mother thought it was inappropriate for her to draw on Amie's drawings. Much of this book is devoted to addressing this issue of adult influence on children's drawing. Should adults influence children's drawing, and if so, when and how, and how much?

In Chapter 3, "Learning to Draw: Nurturing the Natural" we address this issue head on. Art teaching practices inspired by the modernist belief that children are natural artists and that they must be permitted to unfold naturally—that they must be protected from cultural influences have been the dominant pedagogy for a century. The nature/nurture debate still rages in art education and within society. In this book we come down squarely in the middle. Of course children are "hard-wired" to keep their drawings as simple as possible (while still achieving their graphic goals), to organize lines and shapes at right angles, to avoid overlapping, to conserve and reuse configurations they have mastered—we outline seven of these principles in Chapter 3. We also claim that if children don't learn to overcome, or subvert, or learn to take advantage of

these inherited biases, their graphic development will be impeded and eventually stop. How then should adults assist children as they learn to draw?

Each adult who interacts with children as they draw must decide how much or how little to influence the child's drawing development. This is the very issue that concerns Amie's mother. We believe that any attempt to "teach children to draw" requires a knowledge of children's graphic developmental steps. (Note that we write 'steps' not 'stages'! Children progress in their drawing ability by taking hundreds—perhaps thousands—of little steps forward and sometimes backward.) It also requires great sensitivity to what the child herself or himself is trying to achieve. Here Vygotsky's zone of proximal development— the difference between what Amie can achieve by herself and what she can do with her parents' and teachers' assistance—certainly applies. It is unwise to try to move a child to a level beyond his or her proximal zone.

On the other hand, to use one of Vygotsky's and Bruner's terms—scaffolding—the helpful interactions between Amie and her mother will enable Amie to do things beyond those she can achieve by herself. The

Figure 5

Amie's mother's journal, which describes how Amie started drawing with her. Not only did Amie share her mother's "space," but the ensuing discussion of the drawing of Amie and the tricycle resulted in this cooperative *third-site* drawing, a natural transition from the initial sharing in Figure 4.

term scaffolding refers to any temporary framework of assistance provided to encourage development, to be removed when no longer needed. Chapters 3–8 may be seen as a series of suggestions pertaining to the kinds of scaffolds adults might construct to facilitate children's drawing development. Some adults insist upon limiting their scaffolding to verbal suggestions. Others, among whom we number ourselves, employ the full arsenal—drawing with children, drawing alongside them, and when they are older, not only showing appropriate models but also encouraging kids to search for their own models. We have no qualms about nurturing—guiding in myriad ways—children's natural inclinations to draw. Our rule of thumb is that when the child is ready for something new, something more complex, something more challenging, we find a sensible, sensitive, playful way to present it.

The concept of adults and kids drawing together is one of the most important ideas that we present in this book. In Chapter 8 we talk about adults and kids agreeing to make drawings together—graphic dialogues and conversations—and agreeing, implicitly at least, that the creative collaboration will lead to joint ownership. It is interesting that many adults who are reluctant to draw along with children on the same sheet of paper, do not hesitate to write on their drawings. When Amie made a drawing of a character from one of her favorite series of books—*A Voyage to the Bunny Planet*—as she had seen her mother do, her mother wrote in a corner of the drawing a letter dictated by Amie to the author Rosemary Wells. Amie's mother's writing the words that Amie dictated became a kind of visual verbal collaboration. When, on the family's cement driveway, Amie drew a large "DEAD BUNNY RABBIT," her mother wrote both Amie's caption and her own explanation "NOT A REAL ONE." In the driveway's "shared space" Amie's drawing and her mother's caption had equivalent status.

Amie Makes a *First-site* Drawing

Most children's early art-making activities are instigated by adults—at home or in daycare centers (where it is possible to see first-, second-, and third-site activities). But when does a child move from the second and third sites to the first site? Amie's mother Katrien shared a picture with us that Amie had drawn on her

Figure 6

Amie, age 2 yrs. 11 mos. This self-initiated drawing depicting a hike during which Amie rode on her father's back is a *first-site* drawing, made without adult audience or knowledge. Here Amie differentiates between her father (the simple tadpole figure) and her own body (the definite body with arms in their proper position, on the right).

own, without any audience—a self-initiated product of the *first-drawing site*. Katrien described this picture "of herself and her Baba (dad) on a hike we did last weekend (Baba carried her on his back in a backpack).

Our email response to Amie's mother was, "Do you notice how she has differentiated the figure of her Baba from that of herself? Baba is a typical tadpole figure with no distinguishable body/head separation so that the arms appear to extend from the head. The small figure he carries (Amie), on the other hand has a definite body and the arms are in their 'proper' position. Wow!" It is as if Amie's awareness of her own body had been intensified as she rode on her father's back—so of course it was her body that was drawn as distinct.

The drawings Amie made while interacting with her parents (in the third site) and her entirely self-initiated first-site drawing help us to see the link between these two sites. The fact that her parents provided drawing materials and all sorts of encouragement, continually talking with Amie as she drew, praising, asking questions such as "where are the missing body parts" are examples of scaffolding that, we think, contribute to Amie's developing schemata for the human body. Those schemata were then available for Amie to use when she decided by herself to graphically narrate an actual experience.

If Amie is like most contemporary kids, she will acquire a personal encyclopedia of increasingly complex schemata for drawing humans—discarding old ones when they are no longer satisfying or useful and acquiring new ones that help her to fulfill the (mostly implicit) graphic and narrative objectives that she sets for herself. As Amie continues her graphic development, in one or more of three drawing sites, her parents, teachers, other adults, and kids will interact with her as she draws—playfully challenging her to make her drawings more complex. (These newly acquired graphic skills will permit her to conceive and present increasingly more complex and meaningful ideas through her drawings.) We also hope, if she thinks it's okay, that her parents, other adults, and kids older than Amie will draw with her on the same surface—engaging in the kinds of *third-site* graphic dialogues, conversations, and storytelling that we present in this book—especially in Chapter 8.

Figure 7

Amie, age 3. Amie's self-initiated drawings became more and more intricate and detailed. Her mother wrote in her blog about this "springy Tigger. He's jumping, see, and holding a black balloon, and there's a tree behind him." The most interesting thing about the drawing is how easily we can recognize that this is not a human, a mere three months after the simple tadpole human in Figure 6. Notice his four legs and, of course, stripes.

Drawing from Images of Popular Culture

Regardless of the graphic skills Amie acquires during *third-site* drawing activities, eventually the most fascinating graphic models for humans, animals, and other things she wishes to draw will be those she discovers and adopts by herself in the first drawing site. And if Amie is like other kids, she will find the most useful, the most varied, and the most appealing graphic models in the popular media—in comics, cartoons, video games, and book illustrations. At the very top of the list of appealing graphic models today is *manga*—

Japanese comics. Today it seems that kids all over the world want to draw in the *manga* style. It is a phenomenon whose development we have observed for a quarter century—first in Japan, Taiwan, and Korea and then in America and Europe. In the 1980s we wrote about how differently Japanese kids' drawings looked from the drawings of kids in other countries—and those differences are traceable directly to *manga*.

In the late 1980s when we asked Japanese children to draw stories, more than half the kindergartners drew figures and animals that showed a distinct *manga* influence—things such as humans with heart-shaped faces, large sparkly eyes, and razor-cut hair, and there were, of course, lots of cyborgs, Godzilla-like monsters, and cute animals. About two-thirds of second- and fourth-grade students drew *manga*-influenced characters and three-quarters of sixth-grade students drew *manga*-like characters. (We show some of these *manga*-influenced drawings in chapter three.) They acquire the *manga* style in the first drawing site—by taking the individual initiative to search their favorite media for *manga* models. The Japanese children we studied learned to draw *manga* outside of school classrooms—in the 1980s most Japanese art and classroom teachers discouraged their students from drawing *manga*—and many still do. Consequently, Japanese children learn two distinct graphic languages. One is the Japanese school art style that children acquire in art classrooms—the second drawing site. The other is, of course, the *manga* style that they learn in the first drawing site by borrowing from popular media sources and from other kids.

At this time Japanese *manga* characters have migrated nearly everywhere. American kids and kids in all parts of the world watch Japanese anime, play Japanese video games, and they increasingly read *manga* that have been translated into English and other languages. Models are everywhere; how-to-draw *manga* books have been translated from Japanese to English; kids teach other kids to draw *manga*.

Summer, a young girl living in a suburb outside of New York City, is a good example. We met Summer when she was 12. She says that she "needs" to draw at least two hours each day—including the time she doodles at school. She draws more on weekends and during the summer for a minimum of four hours a day, and this first-site intensity has held for several years. When we asked Summer and her mother why she draws, her mother answered, "It's a part of her being . . . She is compelled, even to the point that it robs her of sleep. I think it's a creative urge that she really has no way of conjuring nor squelching." Summer says, "I wouldn't say the drawings themselves are important to me. I don't know why, but if I don't draw, it really bothers me. It's a kind of OCD [obsessive compulsive disorder] thing. I feel irritable if I don't draw."

When Summer was seven she gained confidence in her expanding drawing skills by reproducing from memory TV characters such as SpongeBob SquarePants. When Summer moved to a new school her drawings, inspired by Pokemon, led to friendship with Emily who loved to draw characters in the style of Korean and Japanese *manga*. Summer took to the *manga* style like a duck to water. Since she began acquiring her new preferred style, she has filled innumerable sketchbooks. A suggestion that Summer use her figures in a sequential narrative, however, was merely met with frustration. Like most American and European kids, she was content to simply develop her *manga*-like characters.

Figure 8

Summer, age 9. For Summer, drawing seems to be a way of continually reminding herself that she exists. Every available surface—school calendar, workbook, sketchbook—provide opportunities for that reminder, and for practicing and perfecting the characters she creates.