

The Art of Communication: Young Children and Graphicacy

1. Elizabeth Carruthers¹, *Bristol University, England*
2. Maulfry Worthington, *Free University, Amsterdam, The Netherlands*

Key words: graphicacy, nursery, mathematics/literacy

ABSTRACT

The study draws on a cultural-historical perspective (Vygotsky, 1976) informed by social-semiotic research into children's graphicacy (i.e. drawing, writing). Carruthers and Worthington (e.g. 2005; 2006) have also identified the importance of children's *mathematical* graphics from birth, developing as children move into school.

This is an ethnographic study within an interpretative paradigm. Data was drawn from the graphics of eight randomly chosen children aged three to four years in an inner city nursery in the south west of England. This visual data was analysed using Matthews's 2003 categories (drawing), Clay's 1975 categories (emergent writing) and Carruthers and Worthington 2005, and their 2006 taxonomy of children's mathematical graphics.

The ethical implications have been considered and the participants (staff, parents and children) consulted and informed at every stage of the process. The BERA (2012) research guidelines have been adhered to.

Children's own graphics share a common ancestor; scribble-marks that underpin all graphical forms. Children use their graphical marks and symbols to make and communicate meaning. Importantly children also use their graphics to communicate mathematical ideas. These graphical marks and symbols inform and complement each other underpinning abstract symbolic systems of subsequent writing and mathematics.

The implications highlight the significance of children being given opportunities to develop their own spontaneous graphics within play and other child-initiated contexts. It is argued that children's ownership of graphicacy supports their emerging understanding of the social and cultural uses of graphicacy and enables them to develop strong identities. There is also a need for early childhood professionals to be aware of the crucial place of children's free flow graphics since this artistic expression has the potential to support the foundations of writing, mathematics and other core subject areas in school.
