

Reviews of Drawing Projects for Children, re-printed August 2020

Drawing Projects for Children More Info & Ordering Info



Review by Dr Pallawi Sinha

Paula Briggs' (2015, 2020) book titled, *Drawing Projects for Children*, reprinted by Black Dog Publishing, is a stimulating corpus of innovative warm-up exercises and projects that shines a light on drawing in original and unexpected ways, for children and facilitators alike.

Briggs who completed her Master's from the Royal College of Art and an undergraduate degree from the Norwich School of Art has been engaged in visual arts teaching, learning and practice for the past 25 years. She is the co-founder of Access

Art, which she set-up with her friend Sheila Ceccarelli in 1999. A charity organisation that is currently a leading provider of artist-led digital visual arts resources, Access Art currently engages 14,000 artists, teachers and facilitators who actively use and contribute to the design of visual art resources. Briggs' expertise and experiences in the field are reflected in her uncomplicated language and ingenious development of practices and projects in the book that will lend to children learning new ways of 'seeing', 'doing' and thinking about visual arts.

Drawing Projects for Children, in offering such an exhaustive compilation of activities and exercises, aims to help children discover drawing by allowing them to 'be in control of their own exploration'. Accordingly, the book seeks to stimulate 'great drawing experiences' and engage children and facilitators in experimentation rather than focussing narrowly on outcomes. It fulfils these ambitions not only in offering a substantial range of materials, techniques and skills to practice drawing but also in providing the space for children to develop their confidence, to communicate and share experiences, and in assisting facilitators to plant 'seeds for new ideas and new ways of working'. This is also evident from Briggs' recommendations to the latter in the facilitator's notes on creating memorable sessions by engaging with the space for drawing in 'unexpected ways', issuing challenges and

listening to children's intention with a mind 'as open as the children's'.

In response, Briggs' book offers a well-defined arrangement of contents that unfold gradually to present the focus of the book, introduce the relevant materials and surfaces before extending a detailed note to the facilitators. It delivers visually vivid, materially explicit and meticulously conceived projects in its aim to augment children's experiences of drawing. While a wide range of drawing materials (such as pencils, graphite, charcoal, colouring and mark making tools, and ideas for home-made drawing tools) and surfaces (including cartridge, sugar and wall paper, newsprint and recycled envelopes and maps) are outlined in the book, what is unique is its elaborate descriptions of what materials and surfaces are, what they are capable of, how each is employed and when they can be most suitably used. Such information will be particularly worthwhile for building children's fundamental drawing skills whilst simultaneously empowering facilitators to create awareness and inspire children to explore everyday materials and those beyond their reach.

This is followed by a series of 10 warm up exercises and 26 projects that are insightfully crafted and exquisitely portrayed in the book. The ten warm up exercises include: continuous line drawing, backwards-forwards sketching, colourful

gestural drawings, slow rhythm drawing with metronome, drawing by touch, the three shapes study, making larger and stronger drawings, drawing like a caveman and thoughtful mark-making. On the one hand, these are highly appropriate for initiating interest in, and calming the mind for, the process of drawing; on the other, it equips children for the projects to follow with skills that develop hand-eye coordination, a heightened sense of materiality, tactility and textures alongside the ability to observe details in the subject matter, re-see lines, and explore different effects. The next section outlines 26 projects that build on traditional art exercises to relate more directly to children's experiences of art. They are carefully detailed and build children's visual literacies, aesthetic practice, and a sense of 'be-ing' through the arts.

Each chapter is well-demarcated with specific sections dedicated to preparation and materials, the subject matter and activity at hand followed by a brief note for the facilitators. In each project, Briggs offers leading questions, suggestions and indications urging children to 'see', to 'feel' and 'think about' their drawing. Lasting between one to two hours, the projects heighten children's self-exploration and aesthetic expressions. They capture a variety of features applied in visual arts including the: technical (for example, turning paper to fur, material mark cards, drawing by torchlight, monoprints);

textural (drawing leaves and feathers, on plaster, making patterned vessels); creative (say, seasonal drawings, large as life scroll drawings, animal cartoon characters, making illustrations); and imaginative (see collaged birds, drawing inventions, dressing up as fossils) aspects.

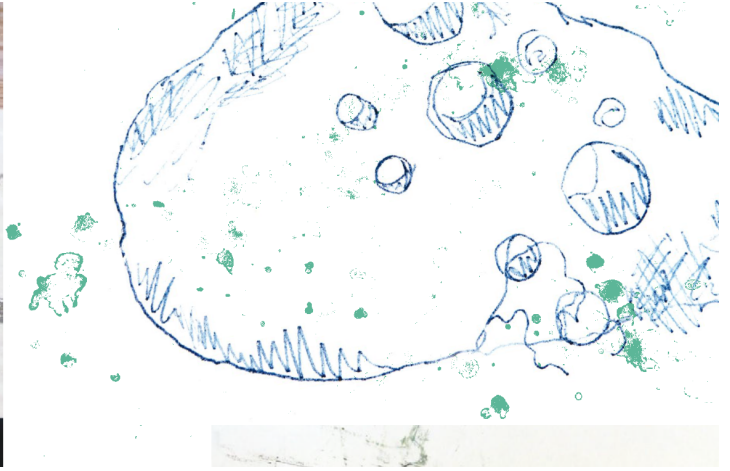
The strengths of *Drawing Projects for Children* lie most pertinently in its exhaustive compendium of drawing materials, processes, techniques and innovative projects. As importantly, it is in its incisive text and contextualisation of art activities that will enthuse children as 'being-becoming' artists. Drawing exercises thus no longer seem to be 'distant' techniques but in fact relate to children's lived world and their environment, and fulfil specific learning outcomes. Take for example, the still life drawing studies of the 'picnic drawing party' or 'making illustrations' that combine storytelling and play. While these are appealing to children, they also direct attention to foreground-background, large scale drawing techniques, and how materials act differently on different surfaces, respectively. Another instance, of the projects' relatability, is offered by the 'dressing up as fossils' activity. It not only enthuses children towards play but also makes drawing a kinetic activity, which lends to the embodiment and performativity of art. Furthermore, the book's emphasis on children's communication and sharing of experiences is another facet of the book that sets

it apart. Such practice enhances children's self-expression, a criticality in thinking and capacity for constructive feedback from a young age; skills transferrable in their everyday lives and pertinent for future-making.

The book also refers to the importance of reflection in drawing, and in certain instances (such as the making illustrations project or making marks which tell a story) offers advice for facilitators and children to carry out reflection in practice, but this is an area that the author can develop on. For instance, projects such as the 'animal cartoon characters' or 'making illustrations' could drive group or individual reflections on what children intended, what they did and why they chose to do so. The book can also detail ways to reflect in the facilitator's notes or the project 'making an artist's book' may be extended to include sketchbook making such that children can record and think about their projects and the journey undertaken. If dependent on time constraints, reflection may entail a brief discussion on their project with the group or the facilitator, upon completion. It may be that such practice is ongoing and merely omitted from the book but highlighting reflection can engender the 'importance of looking, thinking and acting' alongside the author's ambitions for building children's communication skills and sharing experiences.

Another minor recommendation that may benefit the programme would be to include children more proactively (like in the animal cartoon characters) in sourcing the materials for the drawing activities (say, twigs for the drawing by touch, objects for drawing, such as feathers or leaves, or objects for the play and storytelling in making illustrations). This may be a result of time limitations or a strategy that is currently undertaken by the project facilitators but not specifically emphasised in the book. Such a process of material and spatial exploration would extend children's visual, sensory and ecological knowledges.

To summarise, *Drawing Projects for Children* is an incomparable assemblage of ideas, materials, concepts and practices that will ensure children make 'creative leaps'. In building a space for individual exploration and experimentation, sharing experiences and emphasising the value of the journey undertaken in the process of 'making' or 'doing' art, Briggs concomitantly offers children the building blocks of life and facilitators the building blocks for quality teaching and learning practice. The book thus makes a valuable contribution to the field and offers ways forward for (re)thinking education, beyond the limitations of normative frameworks and essentialist thinking.



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