

Book Review

by **Christine Stevenson**, Art Education Consultant, Artist at 1+2 Artist Studios, Sydney and **Diane Duvall**, Coordinator Resource & Advisory, Lady Gowrie Child Centre, Sydney

of ***It's Not a Bird Yet: The Drama of Drawing*** by Ursula Kolbe (ISBN 0-9757722-0-1)

Intended as a companion to her first book, *Rapunzel's Supermarket All about Young Children and Their Art*, Ursula Kolbe has, yet again, created an extraordinary book for all who live and learn with young children. Our attention this time is directed to drawing, always important in early childhood programs, as "a bit of a Cinderella, not getting the same attention as painting, its more glamorous sister." With precision she presents children's creative moments in simple but elegant ways, thus allowing children's voices and drawings to communicate the most important messages.

The organisation of the book encourages adults not to underestimate, but to develop appreciation for, children's abilities to draw. It begins by tuning us into children's drawing as we marvel at their use of drawing for a variety of representational purposes -- by themselves, in play between friends, and treasured moments within everyday exchanges as children draw alongside each other. Next we look at how children in small groups with an adult are able to investigate topics that fascinate them over a period of time. Then it explores how adults can "extend drawing by engaging the eye so that the mind entertains new possibilities," and shows us how drawings can be transformed by making cutouts and using technology. The final section begins with visual strategies adults can use to assist children when they ask for help, concluding with practical information on materials, tools, techniques and other resources.

Drawing is viewed with a broad lens as part of a wider context including dialogue, story-making and inventive games. Kolbe gives unique insights into how children playfully use drawing for representation, for investigation of ideas over time, for imagining other "worlds" and as springboards for exploring other materials. The engaging vignettes reveal the potential of drawing within the physical and social environments that enable drawing to flourish.

Anyone who has watched children draw knows that drawing is a powerful tool in the hands of young children. One of the most compelling narratives in the book centres on a collaborative investigation of ant-life in a day care centre. Here young children use their peers' drawings for inspiration for their own drawings about the complex social world of ants. It is a timely reminder of the way ideas, in both childhood and adulthood, are launched, extended and refined within a community rather than in isolation. The adult support of active listening, observation and sensitivity to the children's intent underpins this lively investigation.

Understanding how and why children draw is at the heart of this book. To be invited to share this understanding is a gift to all adults whose lives connect with the world of children. Buy several copies of this book because you will never get it back from anyone who borrows it!

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