Chapter 4

Learning through sketching

Danan McNamara

"We're going to the garden!" my students yell, as I walk out to the playground to pick them up after recess. They spot their yellow sketchbooks and blue sketch pencils in wicker baskets. Heading across the blacktop, past the equipment of caterpillar crawlers, swings, pirate ladders and more, we meet the soccer field and our garden is in sight just beyond the fence. Some walk and talk, others run and skip, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9-year-olds gather at the metal-checkered fence to receive their sketching supplies. Once in hand, we all walk outside the school grounds down the path and into another world. Here they have planted seeds and starters (seedlings) and have done pest control by carefully looking through the leaves for other life to be moved, gently, to the empty lot next door.

It is within this space that they settle. Some on the sides of raised garden beds, others on paths of mulch. Still others nestle in dirt, exploring and getting close to what has captured their attention. It is a two-way street. Just as this aged leaf has captured Ben's eye, Ben too has captured this leaf. Using his eye to guide his hand he creates the twisted stem, the jagged edges, the cracks and sprinkling of dirt. His eye wanders and his hand follows (Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1

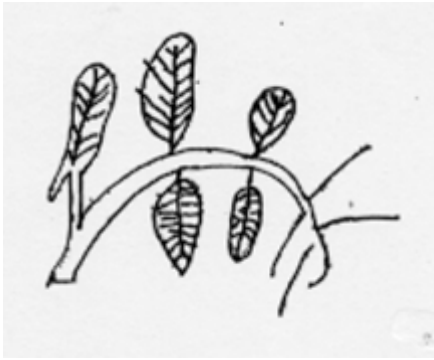

Figure 4.2

Child: Do you know what I'm sketching?

And to me, who sits beside this child, it is obvious.

Teacher: You've sketched the second vine [Figure 4.2]. See? There's the first, second and third leaf. You've sketched the second vine.
Child: Yep! You're right.
Teacher: I could tell. You captured the curve, the leaves and the vines. It's amazing!
Child: Contour drawing does that.
Teacher: Does what?
Child: It helps you see.

In the spring of 2000 I had the pleasure of listening to and meeting Joni Chancer, author of *Moon Journals*. As she shared the voices of her students as well as her own voice, both personal and professional, I found that woven through it all was an underlying sense of wonder and excitement towards the world in which we live. She told us how she and her students sketched everyday and as she spoke I realized that sketching was going to be my next scaffolding technique to support my students' writing and at the same time allow me the opportunity to be the adult or one of the adults, in the lives of my students that Rachel Carson spoke of in her book, *The Sense Of Wonder* "If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder … he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in" (Carson 1956: 55). I've found sketching to be the perfect metaphor for teacher research and it is this relationship that I'd like to illustrate for you.

There are two types of sketching techniques that my students and I use daily in my multiage class of first, second and third graders. One is contour sketching, the other is blind contour. During a contour sketch you look

closely, go slowly, capturing on paper what you are focusing on. When sketching using the blind contour style, you sketch as you do during a contour, except you ignore your drawing hand and the paper you are drawing on, you do not peek. Realize that your sketch may look like scribbles. It's all right. Both art forms help to develop the relationship between the hand and the eyes. They also allow you to utilize your other senses too, particularly the sense of touch. While doing a blind contour sketch, the sense of touch comes into play as you feel your hand glide along the paper, giving you reference to space and placement on the page. Regardless of the style being used, each form helps to maintain your focus on the object you've chosen as you try to capture it.

As a teacher-researcher, contour sketching illustrates those moments, when as a professional, I've had the opportunity to visit other classrooms and peek inside to see children learning. Having seen something like Writer's Workshop, I then have an image to work with to help me incorporate these practices into my classroom. Blind contour sketching portrays those times when I've read or heard of learning that I'd like to try with my students, but I'm unable to observe it when it's happening. In cases such as these, I need to use my other senses, especially when I implement these ideas in my own classroom. When beginning something new with my students, besides looking closely, I need to listen, and feel it out by listening to my inner voice, noticing how the students are responding, are they comfortable or are they anxious? I also have to remind myself that this new experience, this sketch if you will, won't look exactly like the one I saw or heard. I may see some familiarity, a line, a curve, but the sketch

Figure 4.3

itself will be different, because it's mine. Carissa's blind contour of her foot illustrates this idea (Figure 4.3). It is clear she was drawing her foot. She noted how she tried to do a heel, but instead she got something else, an ear. In the end, she can see glimmers of her foot but she can also see so many other things from her sketching experience. That is teacher research. Taking part in looking closely and by taking the time to notice, seeing so many other parts to learning and teaching.

The objects my students and I sketch and write about relate to our area of study. So when we were studying oceanography we sketched sea stars. On one day, Chloe, a second grader, wrote:

> My sea star is as rough as sand paper on the bottom. When I put a magna-find-glass on it I saw light! But when I put the smaller circle, it was just a hole on the top where I saw a flower.

When Chloe shared her writing with me it was clear she was looking closely at her object and was very focused. She had made some interesting observations and was doing a nice job describing what she observed. I invited her to look again at her sea star. When she returned after some time she had written the following:

> That's when I gasped. I was amazed of what I was seeing! Of a sea-star that had light and holes together at first I thought my eyes were tricking me. It's also dirty. I thought that when we where using charcoal. That … someone sketched on the sea star.

Chloe's piece illustrates so perfectly how sketching helps one to look closely, focus, make observations and look again only to see something we hadn't seen before. As a teacher-researcher this happened to me with a student I once had, Rebecca. She began kindergarten spelling only her name. She soon learned words such as "cat" and "mom." She incorporated these CVC (consonant, vowel, consonant) words into her writing, but at the same time squiggle writing, called syllabic hypothesis (Martens 1996), also represented writing to her. In her book, *I already know how to read: A Child's View of Literacy*, Prisca Martens explains how

> Emilia Ferreiro (1984; Ferreiro and Teberosky 1982) refers to this "matching" of oral words or syllables with written marks as the syllabic hypothesis. The syllabic hypothesis is a "guess" children invent for how to relate the language they speak and hear with the language they read and write in texts.
>
> (Prisca Martens 1996: 34)

For Rebecca, her syllabic hypotheses were her stories and they were physically longer in length. As I looked over her writing samples, I observed she knew directionality. Her words and squiggles moved left to right and from the top to the bottom of the page. However, it wasn't until a colleague at my school site, another teacher-researcher, invited me to look again at the data I had gathered on Rebecca that I saw something new. I collected her writing samples and xeroxed copies from her notebook, and literally laid them chronologically on the floor in front of me. It was then that I saw something I had never seen before! Just like Chloe, I gasped! I noticed, for the very first time, that every syllabic hypothesis story Rebecca wrote began with a capital "R" and a lower case "b," the first and third letters of her first name. I was amazed! I had never witnessed this about her writing despite the numerous times I had read and looked closely at her work or shared it with other colleagues and teacher-researchers. In addition to this new finding, her use of capital and lower case letters gave me insight into her understanding of the use of these structures. She knew names and sentences began with capital letters and were followed by lower case letters and this was evident in her writing. These anecdotal notes and findings supported me as I read professional literature regarding young children's development, and how children at her age and literacy development often use letters of their name or other important words when learning how to write using conventional letters. As I read, I connected personal observations of my student's learning with the authors' work. This in turn helped me educate my students' parents about their child's learning and development.

Daily sketching with tangible objects such as leaves, shells or other items that relate to our area of study, provides my students with the opportunity to make detailed observations using their senses. Noticing the way something looks, feels, smells, tastes and sounds is a natural invitation for children to make complex interpretations. These insights become quite elaborate over the course of time as sketching provides support for all my students, regardless of ability or age, including my second language learners. This was evident in my first grade student Max, an English as a second language learner. Sketching taught him how to look closely and by learning to look, Max developed the ability to utilize his environment to further his understanding. Learning how to look through sketching and applying this technique of looking closely helped Max express himself more clearly in writing. If he or another student needed a word, Max would be able to find it in the room, be it in a song, poem or book. In addition, his vocabulary developed as children shared their ideas orally after sketching as well as during our daily author's chair. As others shared, Max was introduced to new words. This allowed him to familiarize himself with the English language and as a result articulate his thinking more precisely.

The scaffolding Max has received through sketching is identical to the support teacher research has given me. It has taught me how to be more

observant. And like Max, I've learned to utilize my environment more fully to inform my teaching practice. My writing too has become clearer. And like Max, if I am looking for support to help me articulate my thinking, I can find the word or words I need through the voices of authors who can scaffold me until I am ready to be on my own.

Before we move on to our writing, the students and I do a quick share of our sketch, explaining what we noticed with others at our table. Having this time built in at the end of sketching time is essential. The students welcome the opportunity to share their work and hear the ideas of their peers. It provides an intimate setting to speak to a small group, practice listening, and inform our understanding. Through this process of sharing we learn how each of us looks at the world differently, and by sharing, we are given the opportunity to see the world in new and exciting ways.

These same qualities that are found when my students and I share in our classroom are also found within my teacher research group through the San Diego Area Writing Project at the University of California, San Diego. The dynamics that take place in our monthly meetings, through dialogue, sharing data, student samples, writings of our own as well as others, provide a system of support unlike any other professional development that I've been involved in throughout my professional career. Just as sketching has scaffolded my students at their various levels, teacher research supports and informs me as I grow in the teaching profession.

The observations made by way of sketching become a starting point for my students' writing. In addition to being a starting point, sketching welcomes revisiting through multiple sketches of a single object. It is through this re-acquaintance that observations become intricate and detailed, just like when teacher-researchers revisit their practice.

The following are the sketches and observations of a third grader. Figure 4.4 is a blind contour and Figure 4.5 is a contour.

> One part of my sketch looks like a snake's upper jaw. My real foot tastes and smells like rotten eggs (Figure 4.4). This is a contour of my right foot. It looks like piranhas and barracudas attacked it (Figure 4.5).

I find these sketches interesting because the results are so different. In addition to the sketches, Chris made observations about his foot that, on both occasions, are unique and offer a place to begin writing as well as expand on ideas by asking "Why?" It is this question that pushes Chris forward that also pushes me with regards to teacher research and my practice. By asking myself "Why?" I am asking myself to see the relevance and value of what is being observed.

When sketching feathers, Carissa, a third grader, wrote the following pieces:

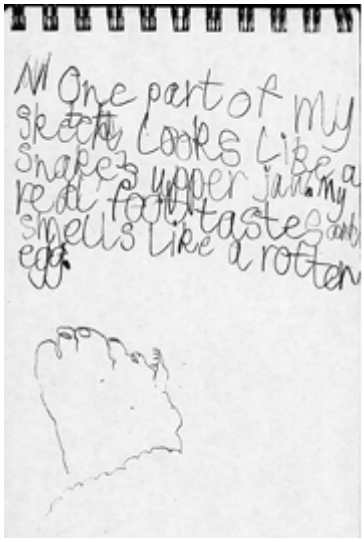

Figure 4.4

Figure 4.5

> A fether functions like a leaf because the fether pretects the bird like a leaf pretects the tree buy shading the roots like a leaf boat. The fether is like a surf board because the surf board can float and balance. The fether is made like that so it can cover up the bird. [A feather functions like a leaf because the feather protects the bird like a leaf protects the tree by shading the roots like a leaf boat. The feather is like a surfboard because the surfboard can float and balance. The feather is made like that so it can cover up the bird.]

While sketching another feather she wrote:

> It also functions like a leaf because if you drop the fether it glids down, and if a leaf falls from a tree it glides down. The fether is like a surf board because they are both sleik so it can glide throu the air. The surf board is sliek so it can glid throu the water. [It also functions like a leaf because if you drop the feather it glides down, and if a leaf falls from a tree it glides down. The feather is like a surfboard because they are both sleek so it can glide through the air. The surfboard is sleek so it can glide through the water.]

Carissa is taking her observations further by finding out how her object, a feather, functions like other objects, surfboards and leaves, those objects that remind her of her feather. This is a complex task. Her first statement: "A feather functions like a leaf because the feather protects the bird like a leaf protects the tree by shading the roots like a leaf boat," is so rich. Her mind

just seems to be overflowing with ideas and connections of which she is trying to make sense. She is relating a feather to a leaf then makes reference to a leaf boat! One might wonder, "boat?" Yet her next sentence takes us to water: "The feather is like a surfboard because the surfboard can float and balance." Her third statement: "The feather is made like that so it can cover up the bird" isn't clearly related to the previous statement, but she is trying to make sense of abstract relationships forming in her mind. Her observations about form and function regarding another feather she sketched are most clearly stated in her last three statements:

> It also functions like a leaf because if you drop the feather it glides down, and if a leaf falls from a tree it glides down. The feather is like a surfboard because they are both sleek so it can glide through the air. The surfboard is sleek so it can glide through the water.

These abstract connections are due to her having been asked to stretch her thinking further by examining the relationship between form and function through writing and sharing her thoughts. I find it relates to the concept that author Eleanor Duckworth speaks of in her book *The Having of Wonderful Ideas: and Other Essays on Teaching and Learning*. Eleanor wrote:

> Intelligence cannot develop without matter to think about. Making new connections depends on knowing enough about something in the first place to provide a basis for thinking of other things to do – of other questions to ask – that demand more complex connections in order to make sense. The more ideas about something people already have at their disposal, the more new ideas occur and the more they can coordinate to build up still more complicated schemes. [Simply stated,] Wonderful ideas do not spring out of nothing. They build on a foundation of other ideas.
>
> (Duckworth 1987: 14, 6)

Teacher research supports and encourages the having of wonderful ideas. As Eleanor Duckworth (1987: 5) wrote, "Having confidence in one's ideas does not mean 'I know my ideas are right,' it means 'I am willing to try out my ideas.'" And it is the trying of ideas that I feel is crucial to teaching. Teacher research provides us with knowledge at our fingertips that we can use to best meet the needs of our students. It supports us as the expert in the classroom who knows what is best for our students and learning.

Seeing the growth my students have made as writers, artists and thinkers from having incorporated sketching into our day has been exciting. My student, Tyler, summed it up well when she wrote that sketching helps her to think. If working with the concrete and sketching those observations helps children to think in more complex and abstract ways, then it will help

them express themselves orally and in writing. This in turn builds fluency and helps my students look at writing as a process instead of a product.

While sketching in the garden one day, a child asked for an eraser. Yoko responded saying the child didn't need an eraser and then added, "That's what's great about sketching; you can turn mistakes into something you like." Teacher research and sketching are resources for my students and me. The more I see, the more resources I have, so that I may, as Yoko stated, "turn mistakes into something [I] like." and create a learning environment for all my students to thrive in. For it is my desire for my students and myself to be life-long learners. As Eve Merriam wrote in 1991 "… to be curious – to take the time to look closely, to use all [our] senses to see and touch and taste and smell and hear. To keep on wandering and wondering." Sketching and teacher research are the tools to help me accomplish my goals. They invite me to look at the world in various ways, the bottom, the top, the side and the front, like Ben's sketch of his shoe (Figure 4.6). And I feel it is this approach to looking that will help me and my students keep alive our curiosity and excitement towards the world we live in and nurture all of our wonderful ideas.

Figure 4.6

Bibliography

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Chapter 5

Shall we dance?

Researching the way we match student teachers with school advisors

Peter Gouzouasis and Barbara Leigh

One cannot understate the power of the metaphor to "translate" experience. Marshall McLuhan was keenly aware of this fact when he stated, "All media are active metaphors in their power to translate experience into new forms" (McLuhan 1994: 57). Without metaphors, as translators that we generally refer to as media, it would be difficult for teacher educators to design educational programs, facilitate learning, interpret various teaching and learning events, or express ideas about learning and teaching. Moreover, without metaphors artists would be hard pressed to describe their artistic compositions with "vocal symbols" (McLuhan 1994: 57), to "carry over" ideas from one medium (e.g. a music composition or dance) to another (e.g., language). As we work in an Arts context, with Arts content, metaphors rooted in the Arts help us explain how students with Arts backgrounds form relationships with teachers who possess a keen interest in integrating the Arts across the curriculum. In short, as art(ist) educators, metaphor is the medium through which many of our activities are expressed, composed, elaborated, and clarified.

"Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, will you join the dance?"

Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,* 1865

The FAME cohort attracted highly creative, innovative student teachers – with academic backgrounds from both the Arts and Sciences – who possess exciting ideas for the future of Canadian education, to this trailblazing project (Gouzouasis 2000, 2001). Another important theme in our cohort is the relationship between play, imagination, and creativity (Singer and Singer 1990). As many academics – including Brian Sutton-Smith, Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, Brian Vandenberg, and Michael Lewis – have proposed, "play is just plain fun" (Milne 1939: 40). In over twenty years of combined teaching experience in university teacher education programs, we observed through music education methods classes that many students were not