

Kia Ora Koutou

Welcome to the 22nd issue of ecARTnz

The articles in this issue consider some of the delights and successes of providing quality art education for young children.

In the first article Lorraine Andrewes shares the teachers' work with children from St Andrews Epsom Early Childhood Centre as they engaged in exploring the traditional European Christmas story *The Nutcracker Ballet*. She includes a Learning Story as part of her documentation of this work.

In the second article Sabine Plamper, an art teacher working in Amsterdam at Studio in a Suitcase (Atelier in een Koffer), shares her observations and understandings of young children's scribbling and mark making. She describes the conditions that can support children in this creative work.

In the third article musician Robin Nathan describes her latest book *Don't Sit Under the Poo Tree*, illustrated by artist Stephen Templer, and other matters.

We hope you enjoy this issue.

Meri Kihirimete!

Lisa Terreni

Editor



Stories

The Nutcracker Ballet: A visual response

by Lorraine Andrewes

10,000 scribble drawings are 10,000 brain connections

by Sabine Plamper

Don't Sit Under the Poo Tree

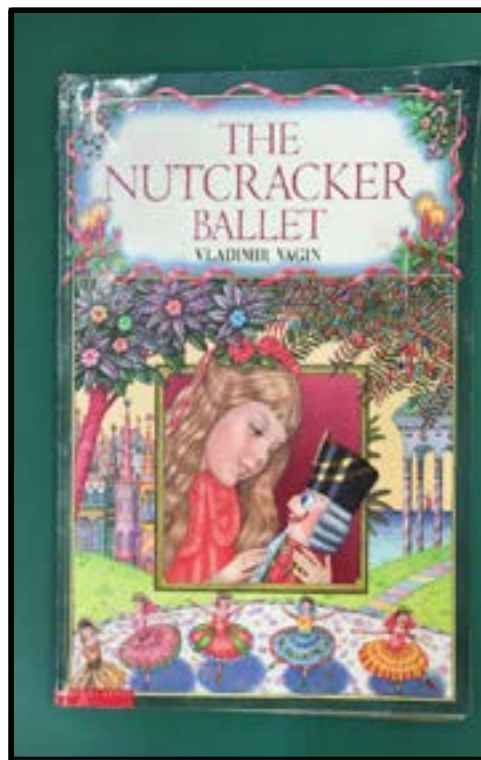
by Robin Nathan



The Nutcracker Ballet: A visual response

Lorraine Andrewes

At St Andrews Epsom Early Childhood Centre, we often have times during the year where traditional stories come to the fore. Not only are they interesting stories for children but they often contain a moral that can be discussed and woven through the curriculum. When we (or the children) have chosen a story, it is read at group mat times and also with individual, or small groups of children. This year we chose The Nutcracker Ballet by Vladimir Vagin. The story is about a European Christmas Eve where toys are magically transformed. We have two picturebooks, one of which is a pop up book, which we feel is a spectacular resource.



We decided we would encourage the children to respond to the story by drawing then painting on left over pieces of medium density fibreboard (MDF) that we had in the storeroom.

They began by underpainting the pieces which involves covering the board with several layers of different coloured paint. The children love doing this. It is quick, colourful and you can't make a mistake. Sponges are the best application tools because they are easy for young children to use for this job.

Once the underpainting is dry the children go over them again with another layer of paint and this is done a third or even fourth time. However, if the colour is really dark then another layer of white or ochre paint is applied to tone down the background so drawings can be seen clearly. The older children are often encouraged to 'polish the paint in' which involves not having too much paint on the wood and really rubbing it out to the edges.

When the story was first read to the children, Michelle (one of our teachers) supported children to draw their image of the Mouse King with black sharpie pens. This was on paper before we began the acrylic paintings on board. The Mouse King was the most popular subject for most children at this time. Once the drawings with the sharpies were done the children were then encouraged to paint their images with the watercolour pallet paints. Through discussion, children were encouraged to show lots of detail in their drawings - such as the Mouse King's seven heads. These works began our display within the centre.

The Nutcracker Story

“He stabbed the soldier. Clara!”

We have been reading the children the story about *The Nutcracker*. The Nutcracker is a ballet – a story told through dance.

Monty said , “Clara, her brother and her cousins, are given some Christmas presents. Clara is a Nutcracker and later, during the night, the Nutcracker comes alive. He fights the Mouse King because the Mouse King is trying to hurt him. Clara throws her slipper at the Mouse King and he falls down. The Nutcracker stabs him through the heart with his sword. The Nutcracker turns into a handsome Prince and takes Clara to Candyland. The Sugar Plum Fairy welcomes them, and other dancers, dance for them.”



We have all listened to the music and Miriam has played some of it with her cello. Odette’s Mum, Vienna came and danced ballet with us. We marched like the mice, the soldiers in the Mouse King’s army, then danced to the music of the Sugar Plum Fairy.

The children have been drawing some of the characters on our panels, then painted them – then finish with our trusty silver pen. They have done charcoal drawings, and some pen and watercolour artworks too.

We all love reading and telling traditional stories like *The Nutcracker*, and asking you to retell it in your own words – he kōrero paki. We have discussed how the characters might feel and who is the ‘good guy’ and the ‘bad guy.’ This has been interesting because even though the Nutcracker is the good guy, he stabs the Mouse King. Mmmm, now that is dilemma!

10,000 scribble drawings are 10,000 brain connections

by Sabine Plamper

A scribble drawing is the starting point for the development of each child's own visual language. Some children will start a drawing by filling their paper sheets with scribbles and then suddenly make a figurative drawing on the next sheet. So, scribbling beforehand is very important because it starts the artistic and creative process (and should not to be judged negatively). Many young children are just inspired by what they see in their scribble drawing and immediately want to work on it. Teachers sometimes ask why children make scratch drawings, and want to know why these drawings should be valued. The following discussion will hopefully answer these questions.

In books about children's drawings, scribbling is often briefly referred to as the initial phase of drawing. Yet you also see it regularly in older children's work and in adults' work (this is sometimes called doodling). Scribbling gives space to try out ideas, to loosen creative energy and to come up with more ideas. Being encouraged to scribble at all ages can help children to try out techniques and ideas without pressure. It can help them to achieve real concentration and this is especially valuable for children who do not like to draw. Importantly, the need to produce a result is reduced through the opportunity to experiment through scribbling. Children can begin to see drawing and painting more as research (Plamper 2012).



In the first years of their life, a child discovers a number of basic marks through scribbling. A line, a dot and a circle are the first signs that a child discovers and then, as their work progresses, they start experimenting and playing with these marks. Over time specific forms can develop from these basic marks - such as the cross, the arch, the spiral, a triangle or square.

However, In order to be able to properly discover these forms, a child must be able to explore freely for themselves in a peaceful and non-judgemental setting. Having enough time and being in an inspiring environment with good materials is very important. A child who often scribbles and draws freely might begin to notice that he or she can express themselves with these basic forms, and can then start to depict everything that keeps him or her engaged in their world. However, it is good to remember that a young child does not necessarily draw from reality, but the drawings reflect their unique perceptions and imagination. The main characteristics of things they draw are often translated into graphic symbols. For example, a horizontal stripe can be a bridge.

It is clear that from an early age, children like to make marks, scribbles and structures. They can often do so all day long - in the sand, with the spilled yogurt on the table, with a piece of chalk on the sidewalk or with chairs arranged in a row like a train. Children turn almost anything into something that appeals to their imaginations. For example, the child in the photo below is making a drawing in the sand that fell out of his shoe.



While making marks and traces, scribbles and drawings, children will find that one thought track leads to another, and they learn to follow their own intuition and interest. They do so by experimenting, researching, testing and repeating their ideas. They are highly focused and, through the work, they gain experience about how things work and get to know and understand it. In such concentrated moments, they can completely shut themselves off from the outside world and be totally present to themselves and their creativity.

This is not about making a 'nice' piece of work or a gift for someone else - things that are often suggested by other people. This is about a research process where children are imaginative and creative, and can express themselves in a symbolic language that they personally understand.

While they examine and shape materials with their hands, associations from their own experience are evoked. They recognise and deepen connections to the things they know and also enrich their own knowledge. For example, because of the associations that a drop of paint can evoke, a child might name these drops 'rain' which they know from their own experience and observations. Nonetheless, often these associations are not immediately clear to an adult. That is why it is important to watch and listen carefully to children without judgement or imposing adult ideas.

Children frequently express themselves through drawing and painting. It is remarkable that children, even when they are very young, often talk while they are busy drawing. What they say often gives an insight into their perception of the world, and things that they touch can have an impact on their lives or show how they are important to them. For example, a young child often says “mama” and “daddy” while scratching and drawing. As the child draws lines, associations are evoked of things they consider important. I once observed a 2-year-old make a scribble drawing with up to twenty stripes, which he named ‘Dad’, and another three stripes he named ‘Mum’. He connected his scribbles with the people who were important to him. For this child, scribbling was an important ‘language’ which helped him process impressions, and give him a place in the world.



So, how can a teacher support and guide children in making marks and scribbling? Creating an inspiring environment where children can draw without pressure of expectations and where they can work in a concentrated way is an important start. Providing simple but multidimensional, versatile materials can help children make their own marks and, through these materials, make their ideas concrete. This can also enable ideas to develop in new ways that might lead to something completely different by chance.

While it is important to give children room to explore on their own this does not mean everything is allowed. Teachers need to provide clear rules that can guide a child’s creative process. For example, encouraging and requiring respect for the art materials and for each other.

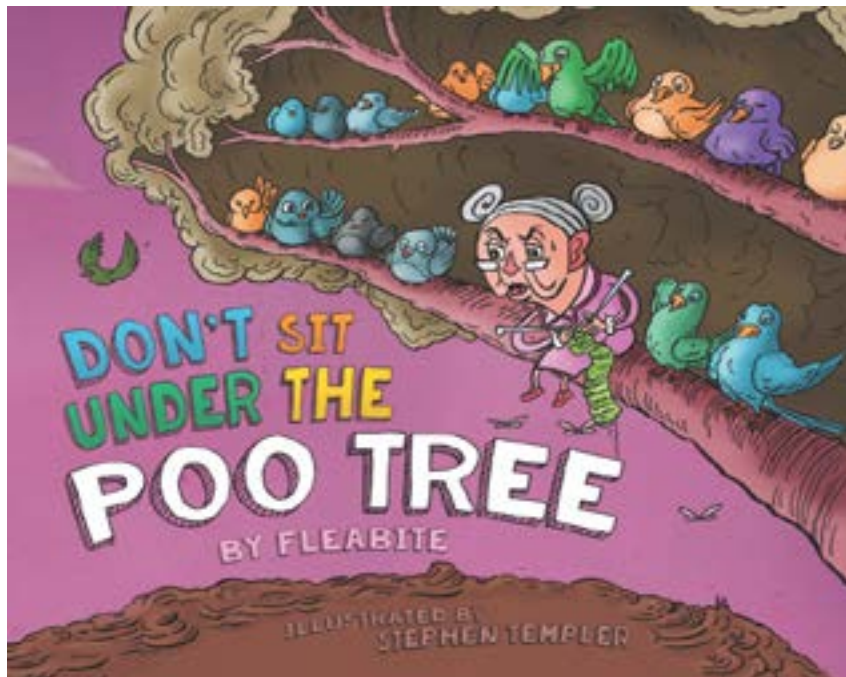
I strongly believe that teachers do not have to concern themselves with interpreting and critiquing children’s drawings. It is a learning process that can be complimentary and which works from two sides with give and take. Teachers can learn a lot from children involved in the creative field by listening carefully to what a child says on their own rather than bombarding them with questions. This creates a much more imaginative space for children. By doing this it is likely that a world of wonder will open up for teachers and other interested adults.

NOTE WELL: The book *Understanding Through Your Hands* by Sabine Plamper and Annet Weterings will be published by Routledge in summer 2023. Studio in a Suitcase (Atelier in een Koffer) is also offering a three day English training *Understanding with Your Hands*. For more information:

<https://atelierineenkoffer.nl/product/international-2day/>

Don't Sit Under the Poo Tree ... and other matters

by Robin Nathan



fleaBITE highlights for 2022

Stephen Templer and Ross Payne have been fleaBITE's video artists of choice for many years, and this year we celebrated our award-winning kids' music clip *Don't Sit Under The Poo Tree* - which has now ticked over 200,000 Youtube views! If you haven't seen it already, here is the link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZ-YNzU2Um8>

A Creative New Zealand grant supported us to engage Stephen Templer as an illustrator (to maintain continuity of characters, palette and style) for a book called, you guessed it, *Don't Sit Under The Poo Tree*. It's quirky and silly and lots of fun, with great illustrations and an important message. This can be accessed at <https://a.co/d/ir5KevY>

This year five new fleaBITE songs were launched into the world (*Money Tree*, *Chew it Stewart*, *My Teeth*, *Here Comes the Rain*, *Cos You're My Mum*), which you can hear on Spotify <https://open.spotify.com/artist/6rfo4U1CM0NDluikxFYDJW>:

Some fun new projects to look forward to next year include: an over-sugared animated video *FLEABITE FIZZ* with Mukpuddy Animation, a crazy new podcast where fleaBITE and friends explore Inner Space, and a collaborative album with the ever-inventive Levity Beet.

Enjoy the festive season and you can subscribe to our fleaBITE YouTube channel to get the latest music videos on offer <https://www.youtube.com/c/fleaBITE>

9th International Art in Early Childhood Conference

Nature & Nurture



**June 21st – 23rd 2023, University of Exeter School of Education,
United Kingdom**

See <https://www.exeter-aiec-conference.org/>

**Nature: How can art connect young children to the natural world?
Nurture: How can art connect young children to others?**

Conference abstracts can be submitted here:

<https://forms.office.com/r/V9XNyzyqxb>

Deadline for abstracts:

19th January (round 2).

Conference fees:

Standard rate: £325 (dead line 21st April 2023)

Early bird/ student rate: £275 (dead line 17th February 2023)

Day rate: £135 (dead line 26th May 2023)

All fees except the day rate include the conference gala dinner and drinks reception.

Accommodation not included in the fee but discounted university accommodation will be available.

Conference venue: <https://education.exeter.ac.uk/>

Contact: Dr Emese Hall: Emese.Hall@exeter.ac.uk



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emagazine of professional practice
for early childhood educators
in Aotearoa New Zealand

Contact details

Editorial Board information

ecARTnz, an emagazine of professional practice for early childhood educators, is a quarterly publication developed to generate new interest in visual art education in Aotearoa New Zealand. The intention of the editorial board is that ecARTnz will showcase examples of teaching and learning, literature, and conferences of interest to educators in early childhood education.

Members of the editorial board are: Lisa Terreni and Mary Jane Shuker (VUW), Janette Kelly (UoW), Rosemary Richards (Toi Ohomai) and Lesley Pohio.

The board is responsible for promoting the magazine, writing, reviewing and editing contributions, and ensuring that the emagazine is of a consistently high standard. The views in this journal do not necessarily reflect those of the editorial board members.

Contributions are invited for the next issue of ecARTnz. Submissions of 1000-2000 words accompanied by up to 8 photographs sent as .jpgs are welcomed.

For further information please email Lisa Terreni at lisa.terreni@vuw.ac.nz