

**UNIVERSITY OF PÉCS, FACULTY OF MUSIC AND VISUAL ARTS
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EVERYONE CAN DRAW

THE DESIRE TO COMMUNICATE, INTERNAL SIGHT, AND FREEDOM

Theses of the dissertation

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I am an artist and instructor and, ever since 2006, I have been searching for new methods in teaching children to draw. Actually, my search began well before I realized that my seeking for new ways in instruction amounted to research. After taking stock of my findings to date and translating them into teaching methods, I published – in cooperation with co-author Zsuzsa Moizer – three books. They have been published in Hungarian, English, Greek, French, Chinese and Russian (*Barabás and Moizer*, 2012, 2015, 2016, 2018, 2019, 2021). The titles of those books are highly telling of the conclusions that I made.

It took several years after the publication of those books that I realized that research on which they were based could form the theme of my DLA dissertation. In the DLA dissertation I could take stock of my original identification of the issues concerned, survey what other instructors and artists have achieved in this field around the world, and could offer an account of how, step by step, I proceeded to producing those books and, finally, how those books were tested in courses in drawing. The doctoral dissertation explores the complex process in which all the various aspects of my activities: artist, author of books, and instructor could merge and bear fruit in the form of books.

In the *Introduction* I write of the introspective, self-reflective and reflective aspects of my creed as an artist. In the next part I describe, in retrospect, my journey towards self-knowledge and the elaboration of teaching methods.

In the third part, entitled: *On the road towards the books – in search of new methods*, I offer a survey of books that carry creative tasks for children in other countries. Obviously my survey does not aspire to be exhaustive. My focus is on related books that have been published in German-speaking countries. When I and the co-author of our books examined and analysed those books, we found useful hints for defining the general theoretical bases of our first book. My survey of the special literature on how children can be taught to draw also covers books by two Hungarian artists and other Hungarian experts. We regard those works as important antecedents for our books (*Krüß* 2012a, 2012b, *Lerch és Löwenberg* 2011, *Bernáth* 1973, *Lantos* 1980, 1982).

The title of the fourth part is *Refuting the frequently repeated phrase*. I have adopted to the teaching of drawing a key tenet of Hungarian composer and music educator Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967). His motto was: “Everyone can sing.” My mission is to refute the often-repeated misconceptions and phrases: “I cannot draw” and “I don’t like drawing”. In my dissertation I argue that when children draw, it helps them unfold creative aspects of their personalities and resolve pent-up tensions. Furthermore, I discuss how children’s drawings can be used in

clinical diagnostics, and how children's cognitive capacities can be developed by giving them the chance to draw.

Parts Three and Four lay the conceptual foundation for Part Five, whose title is *Everyone can draw: what is this book like?* That is the part where I set out the principal results of my research. First, I describe in detail the conditions under which our first book, *Everyone can draw* was published in 2012. By offering brief analyses of drawing assignments, I argue in favour of creating all necessary conditions for children to draw. When they draw, children have to be allowed to unfold their personal aspirations, express their vision of the world and feel a sense of accomplishment. If the right conditions are assured for all those, children's visual and cognitive functions are most likely to develop.

I discuss in detail how we applied in our tutorial activities the five visual abilities as originally elaborated by the Austrian-American expert Marianne Frostig (1906–1985) without the children and their parents immediately identifying the underlying didactic principles. It was our definite purpose to create a book of creative tasks that was a far cry from boring worksheets that make children draw repetitive patterns. We sought to invite children to a satisfying visual journey so that they could find pleasure in creating a fairy-tale world of their imagination.

The five abilities to be developed are as follows:

1. Hand-eye coordination (the coordination of fine motor skills and development of graphomotor skills that assist the ability to draw and write)
2. Differentiation between shape and background
3. Spatial orientation (left–right, above–beneath)
4. Contrasting the whole with the part (how to augment parts; is something missing?)
5. Shape constancy (a type of perceptual constancy that allow children to recognize the same shape when viewed at different angles)

Having analysed the results and lessons of our first book, in 2013 we created the two next pieces of the series. Their titles were *What is missing?* and *Everyone is different*.

I summed up the conclusions and results of my research in the title of the dissertation and they are spelled out in the chapter whose title is *Conclusions*. I am convinced that, if drawing is taught with adequate professionalism, Zoltán Kodály's creed (Everybody can sing) can be transposed to drawing, that is to say, everyone can draw. Satisfying all children's innate desire to communicate, their inner sight can be developed and, all things considered, that paves the way towards the freedom of their personalities.

Bearing in mind the spatial constraints of a dissertation, I only offer a limited survey of relevant findings in the immense literature of psychology, subject pedagogy and other related disciplines. As many as 126 visuals are integrated into the dissertation. Attached to the end of the dissertation, they make a crucial contribution to the textual part. I sincerely hope that those illustrations eloquently “tell” what has not been spelled out in the text due to spatial constraints and that they serve as a springboard for the further discussion of those themes.

The general plan of the dissertation that offers a systematic description of my related research is as follows:

1. The theme and structure of the dissertation
2. Introduction
3. On the road towards the books – in search of new methods
4. Refuting the frequently repeated phrase
5. *Everyone can draw*: what is this book like?
6. How was the book utilized in teaching practice?
7. Conclusions
8. Visual material (126 pieces)

Conclusions

My work as an instructor of drawing has had a spill-over effect: as an artist I also started to ask myself what role fine arts in general and painting in particular can play in coming to know ourselves in our 21st-century culture, which has become so much dominated by the so-called “new media”. That is how I found myself studying children’s drawings and have decided to create drawing books for children. When working on those books, I got an excellent opportunity to study – in concrete, applied terms – the interplay of the desire to communicate, internal sight and the freedom of the individual.

I and my co-author relied on methods and experiences that could be derived from earlier books of a similar nature; and we utilized relevant findings of child psychology and developmental psychology. Since then we have had opportunities to test our books of creative

drawing tasks on children in numerous countries. My related research has yielded the following conclusions:

- Among children, free-hand drawing for development purposes has retained its crucial importance even in the era of the new media.
- Today, just as in the past, children need the opportunity to draw in a creative manner because that can help them unfold their real self.
- When children get a chance to do open (that is to say, undefined) drawing assignments, they will create drawings that reflect on their cultural identities and psychological needs of the day.
- Hence it follows that I recommend visual teaching programmes that encourage rather than restrict children's desire to communicate and help the refinement of internal sight. Such a teaching methodology is relevant not just for would-be artists. It can have a desirable effect on the creativity of young people planning to work in practically any domains. Moreover, it gives those people the joy of visual experience and enrichment.
- Drawing being a form of self-expression, and considering its other favourable spill-over effects, it should be assured a growing scope in various human pursuits, especially in education.

Literature that I have used in these Theses:

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