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**Drawing Children's Geographies**

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**Background**

This paper looks at "children's geographies" as an aspect of "out-of-school-learning" through a collection of case studies centred on thirteen children's drawings. The participants, aged from 4 to 13 years, fall into three groups: four are recent migrants from Zimbabwe while the others have always lived in the UK - five in a city, four in a village. The drawings were produced over a period of several months through a series of "graphic interviews" conducted in the children's homes as well as independently by the children in sketchbooks.

**Research Questions**

Two overarching questions ask, first what a "child's geography" might be, and second, how a child might express, explore or represent their geography through drawing? Although the 'sampling' of participants implicitly invites comparisons along two dimensions (rural/urban migrant/local) the project is small-scale and does not aim to generalise with respect to these implied questions. Rather the dimensions add a degree of diversity to the sample, which makes comparisons possible within it, enhancing the analysis of individual cases. Further subsidiary questions, that inform the interpretation of the data, are classified in terms of the distinction between "geographies of childhood" and "children's geographies" (see Philo 1992). Included in the former are questions about children's access to public space, migration as learning and the influence of popular culture; included in the latter are questions about how children learn to use the cultural tools of drawing and map making, about how these practices shape their identities and give expression to their attitudes and values.

**Methods**

A key assumption of the project is that participants are more likely to express their thoughts and feelings through a creative process. The children were therefore given a lot of freedom within the basic research format to develop their work in ways that they found interesting. The main method used was the "graphic interview" in which the process of drawing and the dialogue that accompanies it are recorded using video. Three different interviews were conducted, each with a different focus and format. In the first the children simply drew places that are important to them. In the second they did two activities: they made a map of an imaginary place using a 3D modelling exercise as a springboard and they responded to a series of printed maps by drawing. The third interview focussed on the child's sketchbook, which was given to them at the start of the project with the expectation that they would work in it independently. Hence participants were offered a range of opportunities to tell their 'stories' and this produced a rich source of material for analysis.

**Frame**

The theoretical frame applied in this study is developed through an exploration of three broad areas: the historiography of map making, the ontogeny of children's drawings and socio-cultural perspectives on "children's geographies". These are brought together through an argument based on Vygotsky's ideas. Children engaged in the practices of drawing and map-making can be described as novice users of these particular "cultural tools". Their engagement involves a form of identity work, a kind of learning. They demonstrate a high degree of agency but they also display the limitations of their worlds. They use the strategies that they have mastered, creatively and expressively, and sometimes they risk trying something new. This framework supports a detailed and nuanced account of the case material. As well as interpreting the children's drawings from a Vygotskian perspective, the

participant-researcher relationship is analysed in terms of its pedagogical structure using the concept of the "zone of proximal development".

**Research findings**

Fieldwork is now over and the project has entered the analysis stage. It is anticipated that interesting material will be delivered in at least two areas: first, at a theoretical level the paper will explore the relationship between different traditions (i.e. "new sociology of childhood" and developmental theory), and attempt to resolve some of the tensions; second, at a practical level it will demonstrate the richness of a particular form of "out-of-school-learning" and consider the implications of this for pedagogy in formal contexts.