The 'Drawing in Conversation' project began in June 2013 with workshops held at the V & A, London. These workshops were conducted with adults; representatives of the HEA (Higher Education Academy) with subsequent adaptations made for undergraduate conversations at Cardiff School of Art and Design.

The workshops were devised to engage debate surrounding the capacity of drawing as an interdisciplinary learning tool, that is, how drawing can be used to gain access to, explore and communicate other bodies of knowledge.

For the very same reasons that the activity of drawing can be seen as underpinning almost every sphere of learning; from Archeology to Mathematics, it is also the first means by which our children reach out and respond to the world; its primacy, immediacy and explorative nature provide us with a unique and vibrant tool to externalize and explore thought.

The Drawing in Conversation project harnesses this capacity so that as parents and grandparents we might share and engage with our children as their remarkable minds experience and make sense of the world.
Drawing in conversation isn't a new idea; it follows in the footsteps of a game of consequences or more historically the surrealists Exquisite Corpse. It is a simple format, to use drawing or other visual imagery to converse sequentially with another to allow and encourage the potency and capacity of drawing as an externalization of thought.

What is fascinating, in both adult and children's examples, is that even in an 'abstract' or free associative form, the visual conversations can be seen to reflect the patterns of verbal conversations such as evidencing dominant or passive roles, a meeting of combative opposing values, a mimicking or falling in line with each others decisions/style/content, openings being offered, overlooked or avoided etc.

The difference ‘Drawing Conversation' brings to verbal communication, is a freer exploration of the world, a new mapping of territories or perimeters between the ‘real' and ‘imaginary’, otherwise fixed by circumstance, age or role.
There are many overt and nuanced ways in which these conversations can be conducted with children but responsiveness and care can enable the most beautiful and unique sharing to take place all evidenced within the pages of a concertina book – a format chosen for lending itself to a sequential activity and sense of progression. Here are a few but by no means exhaustive examples. Please be encouraged to adapt your own:
Example 1

The process I take with my daughter Evie is to encourage her to simply explore ideas (get on with it!) so she initiates the subject matter which usually relates directly to the immediacy of the world around her and I representatively depict her before or after she draws and set those images amongst her drawings.

**Drawbacks:** With this approach we obviously work at different times and I need to be careful that she still has a sense of ownership over the book.

**Advantages:** I use my phone to collect images to work from later, making working on the book more convenient for me. The representational imagery works well in prompting memories about what else was happening at the time of the drawing and what Evie thought of it all. I leave the book in her school bag so she can work on it when she wants to and it helps her think of me when I’m not there.
Example 2

Alfie is a completely different prospect! I coupled Alfie with the illustrator Becky Adams (The Curious World of Becky Adams) due to his interest in writing short stories and becoming a little self conscious over his drawing. Becky almost always responds with images, using collage and cutting into the pages of the book which I think Alfie finds quite liberating – pencils and white paper can get problematic. Alfie uses both text and imagery, he initiated the subject matter of the stories.

Drawbacks: Keeping momentum when working with someone at a distance from the child.

Advantages: When the book comes through the post it is SO exciting for him (and Becky!)
Evie has always loved colour and collage so I was delighted when the illustrator Amelia Johnstone agreed to work in conversation with her, as Amelia’s work is vibrant and energetic blurring realities through puppetry and theater. Although Evie again initiated the subject matter, there is no telling where it will go!

**Drawbacks:** As with Alfie and Becky we will have to manage continuity and momentum

**Advantages:** the potential to use drawing as a means to explore Evie’s world has opened up with this conversation. I’m imagining the pages growing through folding paper, cut outs and collage! Drawing already serves the imaginary realm and I also hope that we can integrate drawing and playing; dressing up, role play – one beginning where the other ends, perhaps drawing a scene, characters to be played…
Example 3

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Example 4

I think that this is my favorite in some ways as I have the least to do with what is going on between Evie and Osian. They swap the book to and forth at school. In respect of their conversation its wonderful how text is coming in and how Evies subject matter has changed from flowers to pirates, I know they play this when together! There is also a certain falling in line in regards style, Evie moving away from condensed colour to more linear, freer depictions – this is more the case in most recent imagery but the book is with Osian as I write!.

Drawbacks: I hope they remain friends (they will)!!
Advantages: learning is a social activity, drawing conversations between friends enables this within a special and exciting activity – vicarious learning.
Example 5
This was a lovely surprise actually. An ex student of mine now a secondary and sixth form tutor at Blessed Thomas Holford, Manchester, engaged her years 12’s in conversation, asking them to respond to either the same story as with Becky Adam’s or another of Alfie’s slightly Apocalyptic tales!

**Drawbacks:** Multiple response is both amazing and overwhelming! I think I may need to use a projector to enlarge Alfie’s drawings in order that they can compete with these… The concertina book offers a ‘safe’ environment that can be broken out of, these A1 images where simply mind blowing for Alfie!!

**Advantages:** A wonderful endorsement of Alfie’s stories and an indication perhaps of how drawing can be used to explore the ‘transition’ between primary and secondary schools.
OK, so I am inviting you to be a part of this project in order to see what different relationships and creative engagements might generate. What I am hoping for is a vibrant demonstration of the discursive capacity of drawing – taken in its broadest sense to mean visual, essentially 2D engagement (although this definition is also a little elastic!), how drawing is reflective and enabling of children exploring the world around them i.e. Interdisciplinary learning.

With undergraduate students we did walking drawings, explored the botanical gardens and spied on people in coffee shops (don’t tell the ethics committee!). The students discussions have been humorous and challenging, a wholly different role for drawing as a language, a meta cognitive process beyond mere completed artwork.

It is important that those parents (grandparents) involved have an understanding of aesthetics as the imagery needs to speak and composition negotiated. The children need to feel proud and have bestowed upon them a sense of achievement and fulfillment.
My examples included:

- Representational depictions of the child drawing added to the child's drawings.
- Story telling through image and word – finding partners for your child can be fun if you know of a willing poet/writer etc.
- Use of drawing as a prompt for other kinds of imaginary play. Use of collage, photographs, cutting into the paper, generation of artwork beyond but connected to the concertina book – so long as the activities are progressive and can be followed through the book.
- In conversations between children or siblings, although I would suggest a book each perhaps to avoid conflict!

The resultant books will be used in the following ways:
recorded and used to examine the cognitive properties of drawing as revealed by this method.
Exhibited in late 2015 at the Pavilion for an exhibition exploring Children's Creativity
Potential exhibition at the Museum for Children's Art in Russia and Prague and as part of a new interactive website for the new children's museum in London.
Given back to you as permanent record of a period in your child's life.
If you are Interested:

Please send your address to: nmayo@cardiffmet.ac.uk and put ‘Drawing In Conversation’ as the email subject. A concertina book will soon be winging its way to you.

I will be setting up a blog to gradually compile the imagery generated by you all. For this process I need from you scans of the pages of your concertina book at various times. I will send you dates for this. Lastly, we are working with children, they are unpredictable, if you encounter problems let me know, we could even set up a forum!!

If you are interested in finding out more about the other wings of this project go take a look at the open groups on FaceBook: **CSAD: Drawing in the FIELD**

**Drawing 'In Conversation'**