Symbolisation has always been at the core of the visual language of children. Making ideas and moods visible is a challenging task especially for 6–10-year-olds, whose intuitive representational style is often associated with Surrealism and Symbolism. Interpreting children’s drawings was easy when adults served as primary sources of icons, signs and symbols routinely used in a transparent cultural environment. During the last decades, however, visualisation practices of generations drifted apart. “Child art” is influenced by peers, practiced through (multi)media that adults can neither handle, nor process.

This paper is based on results of the Hungarian Visual Competence Survey (2009–2011) involving more than 3500 students aged 6–12 from 24 primary schools. The main objective of the project was to develop a new competence structure incorporating media literacy and utilising online digital tools for development and assessment. Symbolisation tasks presented target visualisation of concepts and relationships, representation of processes, and expression of moods and situations in one single sign. Drawings and paintings of children of three age groups (6–7, 8–10 and 11–12 years) will be compared to identify the development of visual competence involved in the interpretation of tasks and creation of solutions ranging from strikingly simple icons to sophisticated symbol systems.

Andrea KÁRPÁTI is Professor and UNESCO Chairholder at Eötvös Loránd University, Faculty of Sciences, Centre for Science Communication and Multimedia in Education. She is Founding Chair of the Subcommittee for Information and Communication Technologies in Education of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Her teaching and research activities involve visual culture of children and adolescents, digital literacy in education and museum learning. Her recent research projects include EU-funded NEMED (ICT solutions to promote equity of access to education) CALIBRATE (development and testing of the European Learning Resource Exchange), KP-Lab (collaborative pedagogical scenarios for virtual learning environments) and SciComPed (science communication in higher education). E-mail: andreakarpati.elte@gmail.com.

Tünde SIMON is a teacher of mathematics and art. She is PhD student at the University of Szeged. Her teaching and research activities involve visual culture of children and adolescents, digital literacy in education, the teaching and development of social skills through art education as well as collaborative learning in teachers’ professional development. The purpose of her recent research projects is to describe the specificity and progression of visual communication skills of students aged 10–12 focusing on the issue of online assessment of visual communication skills.