

A Child's Drawing Analysis Research Paper

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It is vital, as a future educator, to comprehend and evaluate children's mental abilities and mental growth, whether that is through their writings, through their math capabilities or through their artistic skills. In order for teachers to instruct their students to the best of their ability it is important to know what stages of development the children are in and where they are headed. Johnson (2008) says, "Visual literacy is the ability to create visual messages and to 'read' messages contained in visual communications" (p. 74).

Similar to the theories of development that both Piaget and Erikson created, Victor Lowenfeld created progressive stages that help identify artistic literacy development based on artwork. In order to analyze students' and adults' drawings to gain understanding of their mental development in depth educators use the Lowenfeld Stages of Development (Luehrman and Unrath, 2006, p. 66-67). These stages include: Preschematic, Schematic, Gang Age, and Pseudo-Naturalistic. Distinguishing between visual literacy phases can help the teacher to better plan lessons and interpret the communication of students based on their visual/artistic capabilities. The important thing to note is that artistic abilities vary depending on his or her training and art experience in the past. In order to better appreciate the importance of visual and artistic literacy use in the classroom, I was assigned a piece of anonymous artwork to describe and analyze.

Description and Analysis of Child's Artwork

The child artist who created this picture (See Figure 1, below) will be known as "Suzie Q" (pseudonym). Suzie Q's picture is created with pencil and a blank, white paper that is 8.5 by 11 inches. She drew a girl in the middle of the page displaying only her abdomen and above of the girl's body. The rest of her body was not included in the picture. The girl has short, dark hair and stops at her chin. The hair strands are detailed and shaded with the pencil. The eyes on the

girl are ovals and there are shaded, black, circles in the middle of the eyes. Suzie Q drew a nose that curls up and a smile, which is curved more towards the left with dimple marks on the edges of the smile. Around the neck of the girl, Suzie Q drew a detailed necklace showing chain links and a heart hanging from the necklace in the middle. The girl in the picture is wearing a t-shirt with a scoop neck that has, "I (heart symbol) Music!" written. In the empty space around the girl's body, Suzie Q drew music notes and line bars to help represent the girl's love for music.



Figure 1. Example of child's drawing.

Using the Lowenfeld stages of artistic/visual literacy, I have concluded that Suzie Q is in the Schematic Stage. According to Lowenfeld and Brittain (1970) this stage usually occurs in children seven-nine years old. In the schematic stage, children begin to form concepts and their artwork shows a "bold, direct, flat representation." The girl that Suzie Q drew is representing the concept of identity. It is portraying the girl's physical characteristics and the girl's interest in music through the written words on her shirt and the music notes illustrated in the surrounding space. The artwork is drawn in 2-dimension with no overlapping of objects. The girl's body is represented using geometric shapes, but proportions and details of the body are not exactly

accurate or realistic. Suzie Q has not yet mastered the technique of having a background and a foreground, but rather filled in the existing space around the girl to show the relationship with music that the girl has.

Looking into Marianne Kerlavage's holistic view of child development stages, I observe that Suzie Q is in between the Symbol Making Stage and the Emerging Expertise Stage. Suzie Q is showing techniques found in the stage of Symbol Making because much of her drawing consists of varied symbols with more detail in the symbols. For example, the girl's eyes are more detailed than in earlier stages because they are ovals but also have round, shaded circles inside the ovals. In earlier stages, like the Early Symbol Making Stage, the eyes would merely consist of white ovals or circles. I would also conclude that Suzie Q could be in the Emerging Expertise Stage because although she is making symbols, she is also adding features with the desire to show the interest of the girl. The added music symbols were drawn in to fill up the remaining space around the girl and shows that Suzie Q is trying to make the art "right" or pleasing to the viewer (Luehrman and Unrath, 2006, p. 68). She felt the need to add the existing music symbols floating around the girl so that the viewer didn't just have to look at the girl but had elsewhere to put their eyes. It is as if the music notes were a final, finishing touch. Because there is more space filled up, Suzie Q must have rationalized that the drawing was finished.

It is imperative that we clearly communicate with students about their artwork in order to encourage their artistic literacy growth. As Suzie Q's teacher, I would first off, compliment her on her attention to detail of the shirt and necklace. I would talk to her about who this girl is and that I can tell that the girl in the picture really enjoys music. I would then conference or brainstorm with Suzie how we can display her love for music even more in the picture. I could also talk to her about background and foreground and how she can distinguish between the two.

In order to expand Suzie Q's thinking I could also show her examples of artwork using music as a main idea. As Johnson (2008) states "By engaging young children in talking about artwork, teachers help them actively focus on aspects of their artwork and that of others; building vocabulary; deepen perceptions; reflect on the effects of media, process and images; and communicate the ideas and meaning they discover" (p. 79).

Conclusion

In order for all teachers to better understand his or her students and communicate with them at their level, they must know how to analyze left-brain literacy as well as right-brain literacy. Activity happening in one's left-brain consists of rigid facts, memorization, and problem solving, while right-brain activity is made up of artistic and visual skills, using creativity and emotion. Although, both are needed in order to function, left-brain tasks are known in the American culture to be more valued. In Daniel Pink's book, *A Whole New Mind*, he discusses how the right brain is rising in the American industry and is needed more than ever. "Left-brain-style thinking used to be the driver and right-brain-style thinking the passenger. Now, R-directed Thinking is suddenly grabbing the wheel, stepping on the gas and determining where we're going and how we'll get there" (Pink, 2005, p. 27). As teachers, we must be able to encourage our students in both left-brain activity and right-brain activity so that they have balance in both areas.

In a study discussed in Erickson and Young's article, "What Every Educator Should (But Maybe Doesn't) Know" researchers found that people's drawings based on characters and events from a story "ranged across the full spectrum of Lowenfeld stages. What we did find surprising was that some adult college students' drawings were not more-and in some cases, were perhaps less-sophisticated than some of the primary grade students' drawing" (1996, p. 41). Although

drawing abilities can vary from person to person, it is possible that students did not get systematic instruction in right-brain subject areas compared to those subjects that are considered left-brain. The article brought up the question “Would you expect the same of a comparison of the mathematical abilities of second grade students and prospective teachers enrolled in college classes?” As a teacher, I must make sure that I am challenging and encouraging the growth of both left-brain operations and right-brain operations so that my students will be able to reap the benefits in future career and life opportunities. In order to challenge and encourage growth, I must know how to analyze and reflect on my student's artwork so that I can help them become the best they can be.

References

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