

A Child's Drawing Analysis

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We can depict a child's artistic developmental stage based on the scribbles, lines, and shapes he or she uses to form a picture. Children use diagonal lines or spiral lines, organic shapes or geometric shapes, and one dimension or two dimensions to form a picture. According to Erickson and Young (1996), "student's abilities to create drawings and to understand art develop in a parallel fashion to changes in their cognitive, emotional, social, and physical growth" (p. 37). Deciphering a child's artistic stage of development is crucial to understanding the child as a whole person at that moment in his or her life. We researched Figure 1, as seen below, in order to determine the artistic stage of the artist, or child. From our prior knowledge and research, we determined Luke (pseudonym), the creator of Figure 1, to be between the Schematic Stage and the Gang Age of artistic development. His drawing, represented in Figure 1, portrays characteristics of both stages, so we agreed Luke was experimenting with new forms of lines and shapes.



Figure 1 drawn by Luke (pseudonym)

Data Analysis

First, we analyzed his form of drawing within the Schematic Stage, which typically occurs between the ages of seven and nine years according to Lowenfeld and Brittain (1970, p. 49). These two researchers also describe this stage as showing two-dimensional, bold and flat representations. Human drawings are created using geometric shapes such as circles, squares, rectangles, etc. (p. 49). These same characteristics were also exemplified in Luke's drawing of a human. He uses a clear circular shape for the head and eyes, and the body is slightly rectangular. Like Erickson and Young's (1996) example of a Schematic drawing, Figure 1 includes separate

“symbols” for the head and body, which represent the student’s scheme of a human (p. 37). Lowenfeld and Brittain (1970) also describe human representations within this stage as usually including body parts in correct places (p. 49). However, Luke’s drawing is missing a nose. There are many unknown explanations for this such as not enough time to finish his artwork. We may never know, so the lack of a nose in this drawing is questionable. Luke also does not have a background such as a skyline or baseline, so we have more limited area to determine his artistic stage. Lowenfeld and Brittain (1970) say the “establishment of a base line on which objects are placed and often a skyline, with the space between representing the air” is a common theme among drawings at this stage (p. 49). If Luke had included a background or further images in his drawing, we may have collected a wider variety of concrete evidence pointing to the Schematic Stage of development.

Although Luke’s drawing in Figure 1 presents many supportive characteristics of the Schematic Stage, his drawing also shows more mature features as of those in the Gang Age. Lowenfeld and Brittain (1970) define this stage as occurring between nine and twelve years and as exemplifying “dawning realism” (p. 50). They say the details are more prominent, yet there is a “greater stiffness of figures” (p. 50). Figure 1 includes very interesting detail. The mouth is crooked, which gives the human more emotional context such as a smirk after a friend tells a joke. Like Pink (2005), we thought the context, which was missing from the background environment of the drawing, was enriched by these emotions (p. 115). The neckline of the shirt is also defined into a “v” shape, so Luke must have some prior knowledge about that style. This “v” shape makes the viewer think that he had someone in mind when he drew the picture. Similarly, the body is more curved to show the smaller shoulders and thicker waistline of the human representation, so the image almost seems to be shrugging. In addition, Luke pays

“greater attention to clothing details” when drawing Figure 1 (p. 50). He adds the appropriate colors to represent skin-tone and bright clothing colors. Although Luke seems to have addressed special details, he presents a figure that is stiff. There is not much exciting movement, rather just one still-standing character. Again, if Luke included a base line or plane, we could have gathered greater evidence toward the specific stage he could fall under. Lowenfeld and Brittain (1970) say that the Gang Age includes a “disappearance of base line and emergence of the plane” (p. 50).

There is much evidence, which depicts Luke’s artistic stage of development landing somewhere between the Schematic Stage and the Gang Age. Since the context of the Figure 1 is missing, our evidence is limited. As Bang (2000) described, “we see shapes in context, and our reactions to them depend in large part on that context” (p. 8). If the context of Luke’s drawing in Figure 1 was available, we would have formed wider conclusions from the research. Emotional reactions also impacted our interpretation of Figure 1. Since the character’s facial expression and body language seemed to portray a certain personality, we became more attached and emotionally identified with the human representation. Bang (2000) words this perfectly when he says, “even if I didn’t exactly understand what it meant, it corroborated what I’d felt all along: I had understood some basic connection between emotions and how we see pictures” (p. 7).

Conclusion

For teachers, there are many benefits to having a basic understanding of a child’s artistic development. First, a teacher’s understanding of a student’s developmental stage is important to the child’s decision-making process. If a child is at a certain stage, it is important for the teacher not to tell him how to “correctly” draw the object or else the instruction could be detrimental to the student’s development. For example, if Luke’s teacher pressured him to add a nose and make

the body more proportional, the outcome of Figure 1 would have looked very different. Luke's drawing decision would have been influenced by the teacher's opinion. A teacher must understand that the student will grow in time and eventually pay more attention to detail such as a nose. Secondly, if teachers are aware of the different stages of development, they can encourage their students to practice drawing scribbles or certain images. For example, the teacher could have students practice drawing circles, squares, or triangles. It is important that these drawing practices are independent of the students' actual artwork. In this way, the teacher does not influence the student's creative decisions. The more a student is exposed to different types of shapes, such as geometric and organic, the more creative he or she will become. Finally, The teacher can collect the students' creations as artifacts to present throughout the year as proof the students have developed artistically. By seeing their progression, students' can gain their own understanding of artistic development, confidence, and creativity.

References

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