

Examining Children's Artwork for Commonalities and Differences through Victor Lowenfeld's Artistic Developmental Stages and Beyond

Written by Sarah A. Mohajery
Graduate Student, Art Therapy Program, Springfield College

Introduction.

Under the supervision of Dr. Simone Alter-Muri A.T.R.-BC, L.M.H.C., the art therapy and art education program at Springfield College (located in Massachusetts, U.S.A.) has begun to collect children's artwork from all over the world. Springfield College is creating an archive of "normal" and "typical" drawings from children between the ages of 6 and 11. This library will be utilized for various purposes, such as assessment among age, gender, diversity, and creating multicultural awareness. The artwork will be examined in terms of existing theories on art development. This collection will provide a resource to art therapists, professors, students, teachers, and those in the related art and mental health fields.

Children's drawings have been collected from several countries in Africa, Iraq, Switzerland, Germany, United States of America, Hungary, France and Japan. Since January of 2006 researchers have received drawings from Lithuania, Switzerland, Japan, and South Africa.

Summary of Current Collected Data

At the beginning of the year, 49 children's drawings were collected from Lithuania. Twenty-seven (27) of the drawings were drawn by females and twenty-two (22) were drawn by males. Each of the drawings was categorized according to Victor Lowenfeld's Artistic Developmental Stages. These drawings were first analyzed at separate times by a trained graduate and undergraduate student. The drawings were then evaluated by Dr. Alter-Muri. Altogether, 79.6% of the children's drawings fell within the appropriate stage for the designated age group; 16.3% of the drawings were above the appropriate stage, while 4.1% fell below the expected stage.

Further investigation compared females to males, and developmental levels. Out of the 27 drawings created by females, 7.4% fell below the developmental stage appropriate to their age, 74% were within the stage, while 18.5% of females were above their stage level. Of the drawings created by males, 86.4% were within the stage level and 13.6% were above the developmental level. No drawings by males fell below the appropriate developmental stage.

The drawings from Lithuania contained three (3) prominent themes: animals, isolation¹ and technology.² Of a group including both males and females, 26.5% of the children

¹ The term "isolation" refers to single human figures in a drawing.

² The term technology is defined as anything used with electricity.

included animals in their drawings. These animals included, but were not limited to, polar bears, dogs, insects, butterflies, penguins and sharks. Eighty-four (84%) percent of the drawings done by a mixed gender group were of single subjects. Of the forty-nine (49) drawings, thirty-one (31%) percent of the children drew some form of technological object; *e.g.*, computer, airplane, microphone, television or telephone.

Another sample collected this past year was from Switzerland. Forty-six (46) drawings were collected. Nineteen (19) were drawn by females and twenty-seven (27) were drawn by males. Ninety-three (93%) of the male drawings fell within the appropriate stage according to Lowenfeld's theories. Of the remaining seven (7%) percent of the drawings by males, 3.7% fell below the appropriate stage while the other 3.3% were transitioning from one stage to the other. Of the nineteen (19) drawings done by females from Switzerland, 94.7% of the drawings were within the stage defined by Lowenfeld, while the remaining 5.3% were transitioning from one stage to another.

Four (4) prominent themes were reflected in the children's drawings from Switzerland. These themes were animals, isolation, technology and sports. Interestingly, only 22.2% of the drawings done by males included animals, while 42.1% of those drawn by females included animals. Ninety-five (95%) percent of females and 81.5% of males drew solitary figures in their drawings. It is interesting to note that , 44.4% of the males included technological objects in their drawings, while only 10.6% of female drawings contained such objects. Sports activities were included in 22.2% of the male drawings and in 10.5% of the female drawings.

Future Exploration

At this time researchers are interested in determining whether graphic indicators can reveal new theoretical approaches to children's drawing development. The next step in this process will be to determine if graphic indicators are culturally endemic; that is, whether the drawings contain such graphic indicators as repeating symbols, line qualities, placement patterns and elements of design (line, shape, color, balance, *etc.*). This will involve qualitative research by Dr. Alter-Muri and Springfield College students.

Investigators are also curious to learn whether a normative or typical style of art development is cross-culturally evident. Establishing an international collection of children's artwork will increase the reliability of this work.

COLLABORATION REQUESTED

Those working on the project need to collect more drawings from around the globe so that Springfield's existing collection of children's artwork may be expanded and analyzed, and this valuable research may continue. The contribution of additional children's drawings from countries anywhere in the world will be welcomed and appreciated. Art therapists or individuals working in related fields who are interested in collecting children's artwork for this project are asked to contact Dr. Simone Alter-Muri at Simone_Alter-Muri@spfldcol.edu or to call Dr. Alter-Muri at (413) 748-3752.