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What Are They Telling Us?
The Importance of Children's Drawings

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WHAT ARE THEY TELLING US?

The Importance of Children's Drawings

Children of all ages use drawing as way of self-expression and means of communicating to the world around them. The drawings and images they use bring out their innermost conflicts and emotions. Children go through several stages of development and growth no matter what age they are chronologically. As an adult observing a child's drawings we need to look for a pattern in their drawings and to be able to identify the developmental stage and feelings that they are experiencing. Researches and teachers in the classroom have found that students go through these stages at different times.

First, the child will enter the exploratory scribbling stage. Children in this stage are still experiencing the world around them with their eyes, hands and mouths. They are using their first scribbling as a tool to communicate with the world around them. This stage is considered very important because it is seen as the beginning of the child's

literacy development. As the child scribbles their attention span is short and they are concentrating more on what is going on around them. They leave random marks on their

papers. This will correspond with the period of muscular development they are experiencing. Modeling writing and exposing them to the printed word is very important.

The disordered stage is the next stage that a child will enter. When the child draws, their lines will go back and forth or up and down. They will understand the boundaries of the paper and will start to imitate marks another person has made. As adults we need to take important consideration in remarking to the child's art. Have them describe to us what the drawing means to them and write on their paper exactly what they dictate to us.

As the child's muscles are developing they will enter the controlled scribbling stage. They will recognize that the drawing tool they use makes marks on the paper in front of them. As they draw they are concentrating and might even make noises while drawing. Allow the student to describe what they are drawing, let them tell you the story of the picture. The adult should not ask, "What is it?" This could give the child the impression that their art isn't good enough because we can't describe the picture.

The website research (www.k-play.com) shows that children, as their muscles develop, will enter the shape stage. In this stage they began by connecting two ends to enclose shapes such as circles, squares and triangles. They will give names and begin to understand the symbolism and formation of their scribbling. The child will become social with their drawings, wanting to share the pictures and making links with others.

During the design stage the child's muscle control is considerably more defined; they have greater understanding of symmetry; shapes are now combined to make a picture;

and radiating lines will appear in their drawings. As in all the stages it is important to encourage the children to continue to draw and to explain what they are drawing.

The final stage the child will enter the representational stage. During this stage the child is drawing basic people and shapes. The drawings have very general representations and they organize the objects into scenes. This stage becomes the foundation for their storytelling and will assist them as they go into the writing stage.

In the book: Styles and Symbols in Kinetic Family Drawings , the authors describe an activity to be used with children of all ages. The art activity is known as Kinetic Family Drawing, this activity is considered a starting point for the adult to observe the stage the child has entered. The adult will be able to see how a child's drawing has evolved and how they are using colors and shapes to convey their feelings. Students are given a sheet of paper and a stack of crayons, markers or paints. In this activity the students are told to draw their family. Studies show that a child will use their preferred color for nice figures, and their least preferred for what they considered unpleasant figures. As the adult in their lives we also need to be aware that their colors might change if they are faced with an emotional event.

The author outlines colors and the meanings that the adult can obtain from the child's drawing. Note: the color the child uses frequently could just be their favorite. Another key part of this process the adult needs to observe how the child uses the color and if there observe if there **is** any pattern in their drawings. When the color red used by a child it could be seen as a color of aggression and anger. The child will use sharp angles instead of curves. While they are drawing they will seem stressed and restless. The over use of this color can show that the child has a feeling pain and emotional distress. The

color black could also be used for help from the child. The authors of the book state that this color **could be** closely associated with depression and unhappiness. When the child uses the color yellow the child they are showing enthusiasm when they are drawing. The child using this color is seen as outgoing however; they are more emotional than the other children and more dependent on the adults in their lives. Students using yellow seek approval and more guidance from the adults in their lives. The child will use the color green when they are physically mature, self-reliant and somewhat unemotional. The child might be somewhat removed from their peers and a little restrained when it comes to adults. The color purple will be seen as peaceful and spiritual. The children that use this color are easily amused and very calm when dealing with the world around them.

When looking at the child's drawings the observer also needs to concentrate on the style of drawing in the artwork. The way a child draws a face can be very revealing. Drawing exceptionally large ears can indicate that the child could be experiencing some type of verbal abuse from someone in their lives. When a child draws a long slit for the mouth, this can mean that the child is not comfortable speaking and no mouth at all, could mean the child feels that he can't communicate with the world around him. Empty eyes can mean the child feels blind to the reality around them and the jagged teeth in the picture can indicate aggressive behavior.

When observing the child's artwork, the adult should not jump to conclusions. The child needs to express their feelings in words and in their drawings. Children need to be introduced to emotional vocabulary words and need to observe modeling of those feelings. Children need to talk about their work. As the observer they need to avoid vague compliments, don't judge, make corrections or ask direct questions. Don't respond

right away to their work but give them a chance to share their work. One of the last parts of this process is for the adult important to say “thank you” to the child for sharing.

Children will use their drawings as their way of self-expression and means of communicating to the world around them. Through these stages of development they are learning and growing. As an observer assisting them it is very important for us to look for a pattern in their drawings. Doing this the student and teacher can grow together.

Resources

- Kaufman, S. Harvard and Robert Burns (1972), Actions, Styles and Symbols in Kinetic Family Drawings: An Interpretative Manual, Brunner/Marvel Publication: New York
- www.scholastic.com
- www.users.totalise.co.uk
- www.k-play.com