

Step Into Their Mind: Analysis of a Child's Drawing

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Many people underestimate the importance of the arts and incorporating them into a child's learning environment. In his book promoting right-brained thinking, Pink (2005) states, "When facts become so widely available and instantly accessible, each one becomes less valuable. What begins to matter more is the ability to place these facts in *context* and to deliver them with *emotional impact*" (p. 103). Incorporating arts into our curriculum helps develop the skill of thinking creatively and imaginatively within our students, enriching their entire educational experience. Having a thorough understanding and ability to determine the developmental stages in art should be of utmost importance to classroom teachers. Doing so will help educators gain a better understanding of their students as individuals. This knowledge is crucial because teachers will then be better equipped to access their students' strengths and weaknesses, thus creating more effective lesson plans that will allow the students to engage more with the material.

According to Erickson and Young (1996), "Children'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). As with all other content areas, children's artistic abilities progress through stages of development. These six stages of art development are known as Lowenfeldian Stages. To paraphrase Erikson and Young (1996), each stage consists of distinct characteristics. However, these stages are meant to portray common tendencies seen across a wide range of children and should not be interpreted too rigidly. In this paper, I will analyze a child's artwork (Figure 1) based on the Lowenfeldian Stages of art development. This child's artwork was submitted anonymously, providing me with no prior knowledge of his or her age, race, or gender. For the purposes of this paper, I will be referring to the child as "the artist."

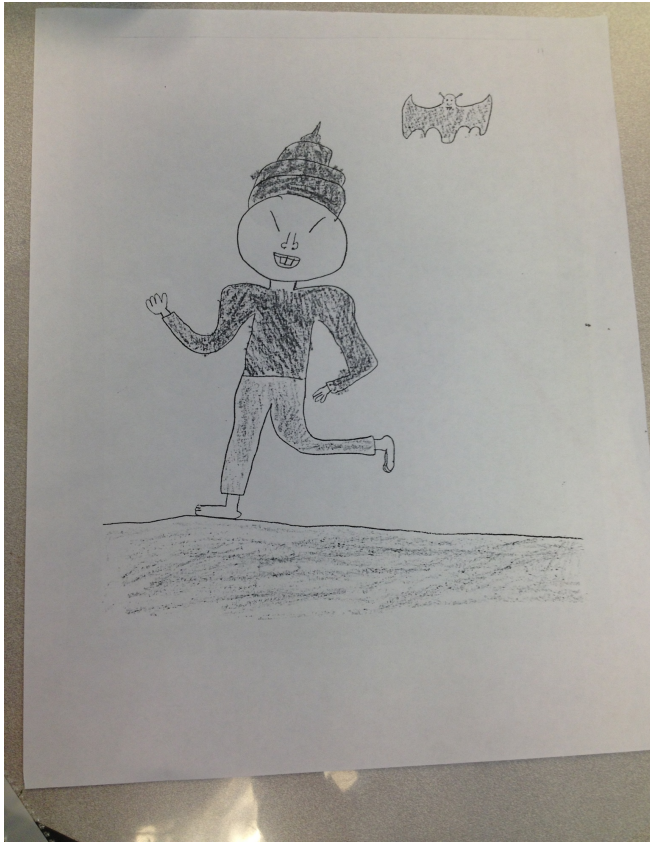
Figure 1

Figure 1. Example of Pseudo-Naturalistic Stage drawing.

Description and Analysis

Figure 1 depicts a boy, seemingly of Asian descent, walking or running. To the right of the character, there is a bat flying overhead. The character is either sporting an up-do or wearing a hat. Whatever is on the character's head is shaded in dark and has a triangular shape. He or she is wearing pants and a long sleeve t-shirt, neither of which have letterings or designs, but rather are shaded. The character is barefoot, has squinted eyes, a large nose, and a big smile. Although the hands and feet are proportionate to the remainder of the body, the head is fairly large. The artist has used a shading technique for the hat or hair, bat, clothing, and the ground. Aside from these, the background is left blank.

Determining a developmental stage that best represents this piece was particularly challenging. Initially I placed this artwork into Lowenfeldian's Gang Age Stage. The artist shows stiffness of the figure, attention to detail, and attempts to show depth through the size of objects, all of which are components specific to the Gang Age Stage. However, the Gang Age Stage, as described by Brittain and Lowenfeld (1970), specifically states that there is "no understanding of shade and shadow" (p.50). It is clear that the artist of Figure 1 had some concept of shading and practiced this technique in his or her artwork. After rejecting this stage, I placed this piece into the Pseudo-Naturalistic Stage. There were many elements indicative of this stage, such as demonstration of action on a picture plane, awareness of depth, close to correct proportions, awareness of joints and body actions, as well as an attempt to convey meaning through facial expressions (p. 49-50).

The artist demonstrates that they have some concept of depth by making the bat smaller and farther off in the air while the character is larger and in the forefront. As I stated earlier, the proportions of the hands and feet are realistic, whereas the head is still a little large. It is possible, however, that the artist strategically made the head larger in order to show importance of this body part over the rest. It is clear that the artist understands how the body moves based on the position of the arms and legs. The positioning of the body parts indicates that the character is mid-stride. In addition to all of these elements, the artist conveyed emotion into their artwork by incorporating facial expressions (a toothy smile). After considering the elements of this artwork, I concluded that the artist was in the Pseudo-Naturalistic Stage of art development. Based on the evidence in the summary charts found in Brittain and Lowenfeld's article, *The Creative Mind* (1970), it can be assumed that because the artist is in the Pseudo-Naturalistic Stage, he or she is likely between the ages of twelve and fourteen (p. 50).

Conclusion

According to Eisner (2002), "Education can learn from the arts that open-ended tasks permit the exercise of imagination, and the exercise of imagination is one of the most important human aptitudes. It is imagination, not necessity, that is the mother of invention" (p. 7). As appreciation increases for right-brained thinkers, it is important that my students have the opportunity to explore and express their creativity in my classroom. Integrating art into my lessons allows them to exercise their creativity by providing the opportunity to use their imagination to think innovatively, helping them reach their full potential as learners. As a future educator, I owe it to my students to understand the varying stages of art development in order to better understand them as individuals and create a more wholesome, enriching educational experience. Analyzing student artwork is vital because it provides an indication of individual strengths and weaknesses. As Eisner (2009) says in his thesis, "...the improvement of education is made possible not only by understandings promoted through scientific methods, but also those promoted through methods that are deeply rooted in the arts" (p. 4). Having a good understanding of the Lowenfeld Stages of art development will be extremely beneficial to me as a teacher because it will help me to unveil the full potential of each and every student.

References

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