

Graphic Characteristics of Children's Drawings Are They Universal? A Study based on the work of Viktor Lowenfeld

Presenter: Joan L. Davidson is serving her 32nd term as President of the New York City Art Teachers Association/United Federation of Teachers. She has been an Art Educator since 1963 as an art teacher and Assistant Principal, Art in high school. She taught grade K-12 mainly in the New York City Public Schools and was an adjunct professor, Art Education at New York University. She is an exhibiting and award-winning painter whose work has been shown in museums and galleries across the country and for the last 28 years has been shown in the NAEA Womens's Caucus juried Electronic Gallery.

Hanunoó Description: The Hanunoó, Mangyans live in a non-technological society. They are slash and burn farmers who cut and burn forests or woodlands to create fields for agriculture. Their food varies with the seasons, rice is the staple food when it is available. In 1967, the time the researcher collected the drawings, they dressed as they always had when Ferdinand Magellan discovered the Philippines for Spain in 1521. Hand-spun cotton is woven and dyed indigo to become the women's skirt. Men wore similarly woven loincloths. Traditions are passed a long as children work closely with their parents beginning at age 4 and through story telling in the evening. Besides patterns on woven pouches and designs and poetry carved onto bamboo tubes, there were no signs of imagery. Children had not engaged in art making until the presenter arrived.

Mountain Arapesh Description: In 1951, The 'Mountain Arapesh' lived in small scattered settlements. They were gardeners and sago workers, able to make simple tools and weapons. They were an importing people and rely on their neighbors for decorated objects. They themselves decorated a single bark slab in some ill defined way, or scribbled traditional stick figures on the bark shingles of the houses.

Main Points:

1. Graphic Characteristics in children's drawings can be universal given themes that engage children emotionally and call for figures and natural forms to be represented in a spacial context.
2. Even when cultural symbols are the basis for children's drawings changes in thinking can be observed in a series of their drawings.
3. Are children able to communicate their personal feelings in imagery if images they view only contain cultural symbols?

Conclusion: Hanunoó children's art work does reflect the graphic characteristic stages outlined by Lowenfeld. The theme for their drawings included Family and Friends doing something or images from their imagination. "Draw Anything" was the theme for the Mountain Arapesh children and it seemed to not lend itself to communicating something personal about their life. In making their images they had no need to think about a spacial or emotional context. They did however show in their drawing series a great deal of curiosity and thinking in the art making process. It is not conclusive that their drawing could not have reflected the Lowenfeld graphic characteristics given another theme.

Reading Children's Drawings

Bibliography

DEVELOPMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN'S DRAWINGS

Arnheim, Rudolf, *ART and VISUAL PERCEPTION, A Psychology of the Creative Eye*,
University of California Press, Berkeley, California, 1967.

Gardner, Howard, *ARTFUL SCRIBBLES, The Significance of Children's Drawings*,
Basic Books, New York, 1980

Lowenfeld, Viktor and W. Lambert Brittain, *CREATIVE and MENTAL GROWTH*,
Eighth Edition, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1987

Smith, Nancy R. with Carolee Fucigna, Margaret Kennedy and Lois Lord, *EXPERIENCE & ART
Teaching Children to Paint*, Second Edition, Teachers College Press, New York, 1993.