The Effect of Blind Contour Drawing on Naturalistic Drawing Ability

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Realistic vs. Naturalistic

**Realistic** - Looks like it could be actual

**Naturalistic** - The drawing faithfully records the actual.
Published post-humously in 1941, this is one of, if not the oldest textual reference to “contour drawing”, otherwise known as “blind contour drawing”.

The Natural Way to Draw
Kimon Nicolaides
Blind Contour & Gesture Drawing

In contour drawing you touch the edge of the form.

In gesture drawing you feel the movement of the whole.
Blind Contour Drawing…

“Sit close to the model or object which you intend to draw and lean forward in your chair. Focus your eyes on some point - any point will do - along the contour of the model. (The contour approximates what is usually spoken of as the outline or edge.)

Place the point of your pencil on the paper. Imagine that your pencil point is touching the model instead of the paper. Without taking your eyes off the model, wait until you are convinced that the pencil is touching that point on the model upon which your eyes are fastened.

Then move your eye slowly along the contour of the model and move the pencil slowly along the paper. As you do this, keep the conviction that the pencil point is actually touching the contour.

Be guided more by the sense of touch than by sight. THIS MEANS THAT YOU MUST DRAW WITHOUT LOOKING AT THE PAPER, continuously looking at the model.”
In a discussion with a group of high school All-State art students, I made the comment that, “the fastest way to improve your drawing skills is to do blind contour drawing”.

To which a student replied, “how do you know that?”

The seed was planted for what would become a dissertation...literally.

Why can some students draw better than others?

What effect does blind contour drawing really have on my students?
Four Hypotheses:

1. Individuals who have previously drawn an object using the blind contour technique will demonstrate a higher ability to draw the same object naturalistically than individuals who have previously drawn the object using no prescribed technique.

2. Individuals who have practiced blind contour drawing will show a greater ability to draw naturalistically than individuals who have spent an equal amount of time drawing with no prescribed technique.

3. Individuals with higher naturalistic drawing ability spend more time looking at the subject they are drawing than do those individuals with lower naturalistic drawing ability.

4. After being exposed to blind contour drawing, individuals will spend more time observing the subject while they are drawing.
The Research Design

Pretest/Post-Test, Repeated Measures Design with two Treatment Groups.

The Pretest was used to determine their naturalistic drawing ability.

The Repeated Measures tests were used to determine if blind contour drawing had an immediate effect on drawing ability.

The Post-Test measured the overall improvement in drawing ability.
Observation Time

A Video-Taped drawing session was used to determine the relationship between:

(1) observation time and drawing ability

(2) the effect blind contour drawing has on observation time.
Pretest
Drawing Test #1
Drawing
Test #3
Drawing
Test #4
Drawing Test #5
Pretest Drawing Practice was from the actual object.
In order to control the point of view, the Pretest Drawing was done while looking at a projection of the object.
Experiment Setup

APPENDIX K
EXPERIMENT SEATING

Screen (Projected image 4'5" above floor)
Platform (4'5" above floor)

6'6" 12' 0"
2' 6"

(Projector to Screen)

15' 11"
16' 0"

[Projector - 4' 0" above the floor]

Table Height - 2' 6"
Chair Height - 1' 6"
[Approximate Scale: 1/4" = 1' 0"]
Observation Time & Drawing Ability

After the sessions where one group did blind contour drawings and the other group practiced, with no prescribed technique, everyone was asked to do a ten minute drawing of this plant.
Arrangement for the Observation Time Experiment
Camera View

The mirror was used to help determine when they were drawing.
Video Taping Session

The students were given exactly 10 minutes to draw the plant. The time spent looking at the plant vs. looking at their drawing was analyzed.
## Pretest Master for Rating Drawings

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Compare the student drawing to the key drawing. Circle the number which best represents the accuracy level. If you have difficulty deciding between two descriptors, use the number between the two descriptors.

Very Inaccurate

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Moderately Inaccurate

Very Accurate
Pretest • “Local” Rating

The drawings were analyzed for accuracy, both in selected sections and overall accuracy. Two artists were trained to rate the drawings.
Pretest • “Local” Rating

Compare the student drawing to the key drawing. Circle the number which best represents the accuracy level. If you have difficulty deciding between two descriptors, use the number between the two descriptors.

very inaccurate 1
moderately inaccurate 2
moderately accurate 3
very accurate 4

Rating

T.O. #
Drawing Test #1 Rating Key

Compare the student drawing to the key drawing. Circle the number which best represents the accuracy level. If you have difficulty deciding between two descriptors, use the number between the two descriptors.

very inaccurate 1
moderately inaccurate 2
moderately accurate 3
accurate 4
very accurate 5 6 7
Drawing Test #2 Rating Key

Compare the student drawing to the key drawing. Circle the number which best represents the accuracy level. If you have difficulty deciding between two descriptors, use the number between the two descriptors.

- Very Inaccurate
- Moderately Inaccurate
- Accurate
- Moderately Accurate
- Very Accurate

Rating: ____________

I.D. ____________
Drawing Test #3
Rating Key

Compare the student drawing to the key drawing. Circle the number which best represents the accuracy level. If you have difficulty deciding between two descriptors, use the number between the two descriptors.

very inaccurate 1 2 inaccurate 3
moderately inaccurate 4
moderately accurate 5 6
very accurate 7

Rating
I.D. 4
Drawing Test #4
Rating Key
After all of the “local” ratings were given, the drawings were also given a “global”, or “overall” rating.
After all of the “local” ratings were assigned, the drawings were also given a “global”, or “overall” rating, using the same rating criteria.

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Examples of Control Group Drawings

Pretest

Post-Test
Control Group Example

PreTest

PostTest
Treatment Group Example #1

PreTest

PostTest
Treatment Group Example #2

PreTest

PostTest
Treatment Group Example #3

PreTest

PostTest
Treatment Group Example #4

PreTest

PostTest
The experiment yielded a little over 370 drawings.

There were three to six “local” ratings and one “global” rating for each drawing.

Two raters with high inter-rater reliability were selected and hired to rate the drawings.

The total number of ratings for each drawing ranged from ten to fourteen. All scores were combined to yield one mean score for each drawing.

The decimal was dropped.
For both groups, Multiple Regression Analysis was used to predict scores when actual scores were missing.

### Control Group Data

(Table 3, continued)

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*Scores which were derived through prediction

**Unable to attain due to scheduling conflicts
Hypothesis #1

Blind Contour drawing of an object will improve one’s ability to draw that object.

Repeated Measures Analysis of Covariance was used

A significant effect was found between groups.

Hypothesis #1 was retained.
Hypothesis #2

Blind Contour drawing will improve one’s drawing ability faster than non-prescribed practice drawing.

Analysis of Covariance was used to test the hypothesis. Though the drawing ability of the blind contour group was improved more than that of the control group, there was not enough improvement to be statistically significant. Hypotheses #2 was rejected.
Hypothesis #3

Individuals with higher than average drawing ability spend more time looking at the subject they are drawing than do individuals with lower drawing ability.

Pooling all of the scores on all of the drawing tests, the average drawing ability was found to be 2.7, on a 7 point scale.

(3.0 was described as “moderately inaccurate”)

Students who were above the mean on drawing ability looked at the subject (a plant) while drawing longer than those below the mean.

Hypothesis #3 was retained.
Hypothesis #4

After being exposed to blind contour drawing, individuals will spend more time observing the subject while they are drawing.

The results of the video scores indicated that exposure to blind contour drawing did not increase their observation time.

Hypothesis #4 was rejected.
Conclusions

Blind contour drawing will increase a person’s ability to draw an object better than non-prescribed drawing practices.

However, it apparently will take more than one-and-one-half hours of blind contour drawing (the total amount done by the treatment group) to expect a perceivable increase in general drawing ability.

This research confirmed the relationship between observation time and drawing ability. It also seemed to indicate that both quantitative and qualitative aspects of observation should be considered during drawing instruction.

Students need to be encourage to spend more time looking at the subject, but they also need to be taught how to look.