

Childrens drawings

[Family](#), [Children](#)



What do children's drawings tell us about children's minds? The topic of children's drawings and their relation to a child's cognitive processes, particularly thoughts is a topic of great interest. It is widely believed that children often express feelings, thoughts and messages which they cannot express through words through drawing pictures. This essay reviews previous research conducted on children's drawings and aims to assess what exactly it tells us about their minds and what messages they are putting down in drawings.

Following an overview of drawing and the cognitive development, this essay evaluates a selection of relevant research studies into children's drawings and minds and aims to understand some specific symbols which are often drawn by young children and the meaning of these graphic images. According to Thomas & Silk (1990), children's drawings have a variety of different purposes varying from bringing pleasure and enjoyment to themselves, decorating walls and expressing feelings and showing others how they feel about certain objects or people.

N. R. Smith (1973) believes that the child begins the drawing with no intention or symbolisation, but as the drawing progresses a pattern is made and the child sees a representation and then proceeds to make the rest of the drawing shift towards this representation and builds on that. The basic pattern of children's development of drawings begins at scribbles which appear from 12 months. The scribbles are non-representational and just involve the progressive control of movement. These scribbles tend to be viewed as gestures rather than drawing in true sense of the world according to Vygotsky.

Arnheim (1956) believes that the earliest scribbles are a motor impulse, this simply means the child has no intention to draw a representation of an object or event it is just a coincidence. They begin to progress from 20 months of age where the scribbles begin to become representational and the marks stand for whole objects. Cognitive psychologists tend to search these scribbles for visual resemblance where they attempt to make some sense of it. There is often some intended meaning within the scribbles, for example dots representing foot prints but not true representation.

Symbolic pictures start to appear around 3 years of age where children begin to understand that pictures represent objects and begin to start drawing simple pictures of people. Over time more realistic pictures are drawn around 5/6 years old and at 6/7 years old children begin to use size, position and composition to show depth, those of which allow more natural representations of the real world and tend to have a more significant meaning. Luquet (1927) and later on Piaget & Inhelder (1969) invented the Stage Theory of Drawing.

This is the belief that drawings are external representations of the child's internal model which is their mental picture. The stage theory consists of four stages. The first stage is fortuitous realism which occurs at 1.5-2.5 years old and consists of labelling objects in scribbles. The second stage is failed realism (2.5-5 years old), representational intention but tends to be inaccurate. The third stage being intellectual realism (5-8 years old), drawing what the child knows rather than what they see and the fourth stage, visual realism which is beyond 8 years old which is where the child actually draws what they see.

There has been evidence to back up the stage theory, for example Freeman & Janikoun (1972) conducted a study in 1972 on 5-7 year olds. They were asked to draw a mug in front of them which had the handle out of view. Results found that under 8 year olds who would be in the intellectual stage drew the mug which included the hidden parts as they would be drawing what they knew, whereas the 8 year olds and over who would be in the Visual stage drew only what they could see.

However the stage theory has been criticised for the stages being too rigid leading to underestimating the child's ability. Barret, Beaumont & Jennett (1985) also found that instructions can have an impact on the child's drawing. They found that if children were given standard instructions, i. e. just telling them to draw what they can see, only 11% of drawings would be correct whereas if they were given explicit instructions, i. e. draw exactly what they can see and look at it very carefully in order to draw it as you see, 65% of drawings were correct.

It is also argue that the stage theory can vary over different cultures. The human figure is a drawing particularly investigated as it is regarded to be a way in which children express something about themselves. Researchers believe they can explain a child's personality and their current emotional state. Tests were created to investigate this, for example the Kinetic Family Drawings Test claimed to measure how children felt about the topics in the drawing and their wider environment.

However further research was conducted to assess the reliability and validity of this test and results proved to be quite poor meaning the test was not a reliable indicator of children's emotions and drawings. However it is the <https://assignbuster.com/childrens-drawings/>

more recent research which is providing evidence that children's drawings do show children's feelings as they tend to focus more on particular drawing styles, drawing size and colour which show that the drawings can be investigated systematically (Burkitt, 2004).

This can cause some confusion though because it is difficult to understand what aspect of emotion a child is conveying through a large or small figure, however as this topic is increasingly looked at, it is coming to the conclusion that if the child is feeling happy and feels positive towards the figure they are drawing then the figure size tends to be larger whereas a smaller figure will be used if the child is feeling negative. This is useful in understanding how children are feeling simply by analysing their drawings.

Children's drawings are often described as a mirror of a child's representational development, meaning that as children grow older they develop more complex and representational strategies of drawing. These are also furthermore differentiated by gender. A study conducted by Cherney et al. (2006) collected drawings from 109 5-13 year olds of the child's family and school. The results showed significant age and gender differences revolving around the amount of detail included in the drawings of the school showing that females included more.

The drawings also showed stereotypical drawings between males and females pictures showing that genders represent families differently. The drawings of the families suggested that the female's drawings may represent their experiences with family relationships and they tend to value these relationships more than males. These results also showed that with age, the drawings became more realistic which supports the findings of several

previous studies on drawing development with age leading to more representational drawings.

Girls also drew the female figures taller than the boys which may be reflective of how she feels about the relationships in her life and that she values her fellow female friends more dearly. The taller figures can also indicate high self-esteem. It is suggested that differences in motor skills may confound the findings. The colours used in children's drawings can also help play a part in discovering the child's mind. For example Dr Winter (2006) states that when a child draws in dark colours such as black and grey, it does not immediately mean that there is something wrong with the child, however if the child is constantly using black, grey and other dark colours in favour of other brighter, cheerful colours, it could suggest the child has some sort of problem which is worth investigating. A study by E. Burkitt & A. Davis (2003) was conducted to investigate the use of children's colour choice in drawings and how these colours related to what they thought of the drawings. It consisted of 330 4-11 year olds. It was found that children used the colours which they preferred more to colour in the objects they thought to be nice and used their least favourite colours for the objects they thought to be nasty.

It was also found that the colour black was the most frequently used colour used for the negative images. These findings help interpret children's drawings just by looking at what colours are used and this will help give an understanding of the child's thoughts on the object. So in general children's drawings which use bright and bold colours tend to be viewed as positive and assume the child is experience happy cognitions whereas when a child

uses dark colours it is assumed that the child may be experiencing distress and negative cognitions.

However Burkitt (2003) criticised this and argued that when a child uses a dark colour it may not necessarily mean they are expressing a negative attitude, it could simply be that the child favours this colour and they want to express this in their drawing by using their favourite colour. The things that children may not be able to tell themselves can often be found through interpretations and observations of their drawings of graphic symbols.

Previous research found the main and clearest signs found in drawings are over sized ears without earrings which could suggest the child is experiencing some sort of verbal abuse in their life, big hands in a drawing suggest that the child is experiencing some sort of physical abuse and aggression, if a drawing of a person has no mouth it is suggested that the child finds it difficult to communicate and drawings of a person with jagged teeth, spiked fingers and hair relate to aggressive behaviour.

However to properly interpret children's drawings, these patterns must be consistent over time and not just occur once otherwise it is highly likely it will have no meaning or representation and is just a random occurrence with significance at all. Wales believes that as we begin to summarize characteristics of children's drawings and watch them develop and change throughout childhood we soon see that the observations that are made on the children's drawings are in fact the product of our own interpretations and what we believe the picture is showing. The question of how children draw pictures which differ so much from adults is a major question which often

causes debates such as is there actually a message there or is it just a typical child's drawing which has no significance or meaning whatsoever.

Many questions arise involving this research area once people attempt to make sense of children's drawings, however many people believe children's drawings should be left as they are without investigation as they believe it is mysterious and imaginative. The research looked into for this essay has shown that the main indicators used in children's drawings which help to understand children's thoughts, messages and emotions are the colours used and the figure size.

The research into children's drawings in relation to children's minds has found many results showing that drawings do relate to the child's cognitions however all research into interpreting children's drawings and what it tells us about their minds can be criticised because it could just be that the child enjoys drawing something particular and their decision to draw what they are drawing is always influenced by their own knowledge of the object and their own thoughts and interpretations on the object and what bits are important about it.

The drawing is a representation of how the child sees the world themselves and it is thought that to alter this information by adding adult interpretations and to investigate more into it is a shame. As the child's cognition capacity increasing, children are more able to express representations as they move from simple drawings, to complex drawings. It is difficult to conclude whether these drawings actually represent something to the child or whether it is simply our own interpretations and representations.

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