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CHILDREN'S DRAWINGS AND DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Children's drawings were studied to discover cognitive and social abilities of children. Children's development is also identified through drawings. A number of theories were developed on the development of children's drawings. The purpose of the study is to compare drawings done by 5-year-old and 8-year-old children with Lowenfeld's theory on stages of art development since none is found in Malaysia. Qualitative method was used in the study, where observation and interviews were done in collecting data. The children were observed when they draw and interviews were done afterwards in order to find out what was drawn. Findings indicate that the drawings made were incongruent with the theories of development. The theory was found to be applicable to Malaysian children as well.

Keywords: children's drawing, Lowenfeld's theory, Malaysian children, qualitative method

1. INTRODUCTION

Drawing offers a playing field on which children can try out new ideas or perspectives. According to Davis (2005), children intrinsically want to figure out solutions through play, visual arts and any other available media. Other research demonstrates that children weave together drawing with talking, writing, movement and sounds (Dysan, 1989; Gallas, 1994).

When children draw, they are using their creativity and imagination in making the drawings. This actually can enhance children's cognitive abilities. Drawings also were found to promote the first writing, and

the writing becomes the first reading material that children themselves are the authors (Baghban, 2007). This is also supported by Soundy and Drucker (2009) when they suggested that children's drawings are considered a connecting force that helps introduce young learners to more significant graphic code-the written work and the nature of its connection to meanings.

Furthermore, Brooks (2002) found that children who draw objects from observations tends to be more detail than those who draw out from their memory.

Drawings were also studied to investigate the children's art development. Children's drawings are useful tool in monitoring the development a child goes through (Children's drawings; What can we infer from them, 2010).

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A lot of theories of drawing development has emerged since 1940's. One of the most widely referred is the theory created by Victor Lowenfeld's theory on stages of art development which will be employed in this study. In his book, *Creative and Mental Growth*, that was first published in 1947, he suggested six stages of drawing development. The first stage is the scribbling stage for children up to 2 years old. This stage is simply children's enjoyment of kinaesthetic activities where the drawings has no meanings, only some round shapes and all

The second stage is the pre-schematic stage of 3-4 years old. According to him, the first representation attempt for children at this stage is a person. The drawings provide a tangible record of the child's thinking process and they continually search for new concepts and therefore the symbols they made are constantly change (Donley, 1987). The third stage of children at the age of 5 to 6 is the schematic stage

where children arrive at a schema and the children's active knowledge of the symbols and concepts (Donley, 1987). There is also a definite order of space relationship where everything sits on the baseline (Donley, 1987).

The gang stage; the dawning realism is the fourth stage suggested by Lowenfeld. At this stage of children aged 7-10 years old draw how things look like and they are expressed with more details. Children at this stage are more prone to compare their drawings with their peers and are more anxious to conform to others (Baghban, 2007).

At the age of 11-13, the pseudo-naturalistic stage discovered children are increasingly critical of their drawings. They at their best trying to produce adult-like naturalistic drawings, where they pay attention to shadows, folds, lights and motions (Donley, 1987).

The final stage is called the period of decision of 14-16-year olds. At this stage, students are critically aware of their immaturity of their drawings and easily discouraged. Nothing can be done at this stage since students are consciously aware of their own drawing abilities and they will choose not to draw unless if they want to improve their drawings (Baghban, 2007).

However, the theory has not put into application to the Malaysian context. Therefore the aim of this paper is to explore the application of the theory to drawings done by Malaysian children.

3. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

It was agreed that technical skills of drawing improved steadily with age, including the ability to draw realistically (Winner, 2006). A lot of research was done on children's drawing to explore their development. According to Kitahara and

Matsuishi (n.d.), children's ability of skilled control and development of fingers are some of the key factors that influence children's drawings. They added that the exposure of kids to the environment also affect how the draw (Kitahara & Matsuishi, n.d.).

Another research done by Pinto and Bombi (1996) revealed that there is an evolution on the ability to draw in children. In their study on drawing human figure, they found that children who are older than 5 to 6 years are able to create the impression of observers of seeing a person from the side. Younger children can only produce human figure from the front facing (Pinto & Bombi, 1996).

However, it is also found that children draw less frequently as they grow older and children seemed to lost their playfulness in their drawings and that they become conventional as they reach the age of 9 and 10 (Winner, 2006).

A research to compare Lowenfeld and Read theories of development was also found where the author suggested that those theories and concepts are to be similar with extended details (Children's art, n.d.). The author found that Read's theory is somewhat offered Lowenfeld's theory explanation for each stage.

Furthermore, quantitative study done by Alter-Muri (2002) on the application of Lowenfeld's theory on the stages of art development to Swiss, Hungarian, Germanise and French exposed various conclusions. Most of the drawings created under study, however, indicated in the Lowenfeld's stage for their age group with few exceptions on some children fall at advanced stage whereas a few scored lower than their chronological ages (Alter-Muri, 2002).

Nonetheless, none of the researches explored any specific theory of arts development in Malaysian children. Hence, the study hypothesized that Lowenfeld's

theory on stages of art development is also applicable to the two drawings made by Malaysian children.

4. RESEARCH METHOD

Qualitative method was employed in the study, where observations and interviews were done concurrently. Two children at the age of 5 and 8 were the participants of the study. They were asked to draw anything that they want at that moment and they were observed during that time. Later, they were asked on what they have drawn and how do they feel when they were drawings.

An analytic induction of data analysis was used in order to come into conclusion. In analytic induction data analysis, hypothesis is made prior to the research and it is put into test throughout the process of doing the research where at the same time modification of concepts and relationships between concepts are allowed, with the goal of finding out what is the most accurate concept should applied (Ratcliff, 1994).

In order to realize the data analysis, Lowenfeld's theory on the stages of art development was compared to the drawings done by the two Malaysian children. The interpretations with interviews are reflected in the result section.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first participant whose ages 5 years old is named Fatin A with her drawing labelled Drawing A (Appendix A), and the second participant whose aged 8 years old is named Fatin B with her drawing labelled Drawing B (Appendix B).

Fatin A drew several objects in her drawing such as stars, spoons, colour pencils, food container's lids, rain drops, moon, eyebrows, tooth, eyes (with no

connection to eyebrows), shapes and sun. She was initially had no idea on what to draw when she started with drawing flowers only (Appendix C). This did not satisfy me and I had to give her another piece of blank paper and her mother and I initiated a few things to draw. There is no relationship found among the objects that she drew. She just drew whatever she saw in the house at the moment and what being recommended by her mother and me. She was later asked what were the things drawn, and she felt tired drawing.

Lowenfeld's theory of Pre-schematic was compared then to Drawing A. For one thing, Fatin A did not have any intention of drawing a human figure in the beginning of the session. This was found contradicting with Lowenfeld's suggestion that the first attempt of children at this age is a person (Donley, 1987). However, when comparison was made to other dimensions, it was found to be consistent, that is, at this stage, objects are unrelated, float around the page, not in proportion to one another, and distorted to fit the available space (Alter-Muri, 2002).

Drawing B by the 8-year-old child represented the KLCC building in the town of Kuala Lumpur. No initiation was made in the beginning of the observation. When interview was done about her drawing, Fatin B mentioned that she likes going to KLCC. She drew the mice at the bottom of the drawing was her imagination of the existence of mice in such big building, and the mice were happily listened to the radio because a lot of food is available at KLCC. Fatin B was eager to draw more and said she was happy to draw more.

Drawing B was then compared to Lowenfeld's Gang stage. According to that stage, children tend to draw more an experience than photographic sense of particular object. They also have the characteristics of baseline and sky line.

Children at this age can also differentiate large and small objects in the drawings. Children can tell a story from their drawing when they are asked for it (Children's art, n.d.).

Therefore, it is clearly showed that Drawing B fits into Lowenfeld's theory on stages of art development, the Gang stage. Birds flying at the upper side of the drawing represent that she knows the sky line. On the other hand, mice, "no parking" sign, tree and the building seemed to be consistent at the baseline or ground pace.

6. CONCLUSION

The present study has found that Lowenfeld's theory on stages of art development is applicable to the drawings collected.

Drawing A with objects unrelated to each other, scattered in the drawing paper indicated that the objects are typically floating on the page in the drawing (Roland, 2006). Besides, it was also found that at the age of Pre-schematic stage, children have regular repetition of schema, which is clearly seen in Drawing A, where the rain drops were repeatedly drawn. Additionally, some shapes were drawn indicated what Lowenfeld suggested as simple geometric forms were among those interested things that children at this age would like to draw (Donley, 1987).

Drawing B was also found to match Lowenfeld's Gang stage, where at this stage, children are no longer placed objects side by side on the baseline, but rather in relation to one another on a page with a ground plane, which means that everything is drawn on top on what is perceived by ground (Roland, 2006).

Furthermore, at this stage, drawings can be symbolic representation of those who drew it, a visual metaphor that represents their feelings (Children's art, n.d.). this is

found clearly when Fatin B said she likes going to KLCC, which indicates that they is a symbolic reason for drawing it, and not only for subjective reasons (Roland, 2006).

Therefore, it can be concluded that Lowenfeld's theory on stages of art development is applicable to Malaysian context at looking at the drawings done by two Malaysian children.

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