



Exploring the drawings of children: A focus on the Kumasi Metropolis in Ghana

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Abstract

The paper presents a qualitative report of a study that examined the drawings of children in selected schools in Kumasi, Ghana. It was a qualitative inquiry involving children in public schools within the ages of eight to ten years. The drawings formed the principal instrument for the data collection after purposively sampling four public schools in different locations in the Kumasi Metropolis in Ghana. Some of the major findings were that children have a natural inclination for self-expression and the drawings offered a means for the children to express their experiences. Also, the children's drawings offered clues to their feelings, mood, behaviour and personality traits. In addition, it was concluded that drawing could be used to understand the expressive capabilities of children in different locations; it is therefore recommended that drawing exercises should be more interactive and teachers must engage the learners in more conversations to understand them.

Keywords: drawings, environment, personality, self-expression

Introduction

Art educators throughout the world have conducted studies to find out whether children's drawings are influenced by the environment in order to provide feedback about the children's performance (Toku, 2001; Alland, 1983; Harris, 1981; Chapman, 1978; Hargreaves, 1978; Lowenfield & Brittain, 1975; Eisner, 1967)^[2, 5, 19, 11]. However, the extent to which the environment influences children and their drawings which varies from place to place has not received extensive investigation. In fact, most of the studies conducted on children's drawings are limited to countries outside the precincts of Africa. It is against this background that this study is carried out through qualitative approach to understand the drawings of children based on the environmental settings in Ghana, in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Literature on the artistic development of children from one to five years reveal a universal pattern of graphic representation in their drawings (Chapman, 1978; Lowenfield & Brittain, 1975)^[5]. Beyond five years, it is possible that children in different parts of the world would show some amount of cultural specificity in their drawings as a result of the environmental differences. For instance, children living in remote areas of Africa are likely to behave differently from those of Western Europe. This is bound to reflect in their drawings. It has also been observed that much of the literature on children's drawings is based on studies done in United Kingdom and United States of America (Toku, 2001; Chapman, 1978; Lowenfield & Brittain, 1970)^[5]. Furthermore, very little materials exist on the study of drawings made by Ghanaian children aged eight to ten years. With a quest for the development of the child that should involve the cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains of the learner, it is essential also to pay critical attention to the artistic or creative development of the child. This can be done through studying children's drawing skills and other art

disciplines and providing learners with appropriate feedbacks. A curriculum for the visual arts education of the primary school child in Ghana requires an idea about how the environment of the Ghanaian child influences him/her in his/her drawings. Through an understanding of the way a youngster draws and the method he/she uses to portray the environment, one can gain an insight into children's behaviour and aspirations. Children's drawing can be fascinating and a conscious study of it serves as a means to develop an appreciation for the complex and varied ways in which children grow and develop.

Advocacy for the study of children

It is fascinating to watch children at play and according to Santrock (2008)^[31], the child is an active learner. Santrock maintains that some developments in children's education are credited to the ideals of John Dewey, an educational psychologist who believed that children should not be made to sit quietly in their seats and passively learn by rote. Dewey believes that children learn best by doing. In fact, education should focus on the whole child and adaptation to his/her environment. The more one learns about children the better one can deal with them. Perhaps, people even gain some insight into their own history – as infants, as children, and as adolescents. Santrock also confirms that children can be studied through observation and I believe that naturalistic observation may be used when it is unethical to subject children to various experimental situations. An example is studying the effect of maternal separation by using a sample of children who are enrolled in day-care centres and observing and comparing their behaviour to children who remain at home with their mothers. DeVries, Zan, Hildebrandt, Edmiaston, and Sales (2002)^[8] also add that observation enables one to understand where the children are in their development and learning. It should be noted that observation

also helps one to identify children's personality, temperament, likes and dislikes. It is based on the assertions of John Dewey, Hildebrand and other authors cited above that the researcher found it expedient to use observation as one of the instruments in conducting the study.

Lowenfeld and Brittain (1975) state that a child is a dynamic being and art becomes for him/her a language of thought. If it were possible for children to develop without interference from the outside world, no special stimulation for their creative work would be necessary. Commenting on art and children's perception of physicians, Kaimal, Rattigan, Miller, and Haddy (2016) [21] emphasises that the art pieces that children make, especially drawings, serve as safe and tangible media of communication between the child and the physician. This comment points to the therapeutic implications of art for physicians' work with children, and the fact that children's drawings are valuable opportunities for improving their health.

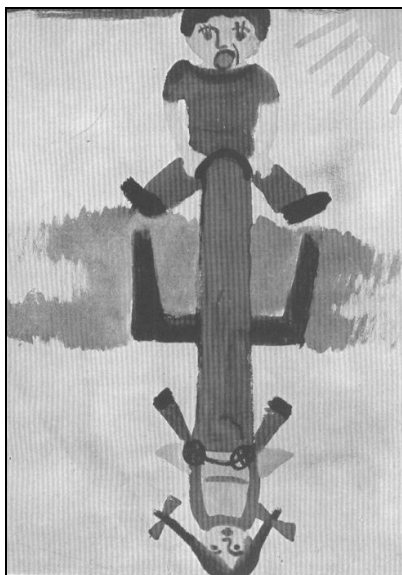
Commenting on children's drawing, Gilbert (1998) also states that in drawing far more than in speech, children, reveal their fantasies and their fears. Whatever the content, nearly all

children draw, which shows how universal is this method of expression, children begin to draw long before they begin to write. Herberholz and Herberholz (1998) [20] continue by stating that children begin to make marks and proceed to draw graphic symbols (geometric schemes). For most children, this natural progression in graphic expression is sequential as emphasized by Lowenfeld and Brittain (1975), Chapman (1978) [5], and Bissoli (2014) [3].

Drawings of Children - From Age 7 to 10

The following are basic characteristics of the drawings of children from the age of seven to ten, as emphasised by Lowenfeld and Brittain (1975), Chapman (1978) [5]:

- Body parts are portrayed depending on the child's active knowledge of them.
- Head, body, arm, legs and feet, eye, and nose are represented distinctly from each other with symbols.
- The schema consists of geometric forms and when separated lose their meaning.
- There is awareness of space-ground relationship.
- Clothing often forms part of the body.



Source: Lowenfeld and Brittain (1975)

Fig 1: On the see saw

The Primary School Curriculum in Ghana

One of the emerging issues of the primary school curriculum in Ghana might be that, the procedure for designing the primary school curriculum is not comprehensive enough to meet the challenges of Ghana's educational aims, objectives as well as its philosophical underpinnings. Ghana's educational reforms have developed over a period of time since independence. With regard to primary school education, the generalist philosophy of a teacher for all subjects does not promote effective teaching of all subjects. In fact, Acquah, Eshun, and Afful-Broni (2013) [1] and Ashley (2005) argue for a close look at it to ameliorate the situation. Thus, the perception that where primary school teachers have been given an all-round training and as a consequence, have adequate knowledge on all subjects raises some concerns about instructional quality in schools. For instance, if a

particular teacher is not proficient in a particular subject area, the learners do not have the privilege to benefit from her output in that area. In this regard, a teacher who is not abreast with how to teach art or drawing will find it difficult to live up to expectation.

It has also been argued by Bruner (1979) and Edwards (1979) that the human mind is also an image-making mind. It is not just a word or figure formulating entity. Therefore, from the beginning of their education, children should not be deprived of a means for expressing themselves visually or be denied the opportunity of developing their senses of perception. Bruner and Edwards emphasised that the left and right lobes of the brain are specialized. One side deals with recording symbols of language and constructing concepts using the logic of words and numbers. The other side specializes in special dexterity and constructs concepts with visual images. Without

a comprehensive structure of visual art education for the child, we develop the word side of the brain, while the visual side of the brain remains underdeveloped.

The foundation for creative thinking and its encouragement in the school system is a necessity for the realization of the technological advancement of the nation. To achieve this, “the barrier between Science and Mathematics on one hand and the Arts and Culture on the other should be bridged ... both the arts and the sciences contribute substantially to human achievements” (Flolu, 2000, p. 4) ^[13]. Again, it is also crucial to consider factors within the environment of the learner in order for the learner to achieve the optimum benefits from what is taught.

The context of the environment

The word environment is derived from the French word “environ” which means “surrounding”. These include human beings, plants, animals, microbes, among others as well as abiotic factors such as light, air, water, soil, etc. Thus, environment consists of a wide range of both visible and intangible items/scenarios. It could be auditory environment, social environment, emotional environment, or physical environment. The auditory environment of the child includes music and sound patterns that stimulate several portions of the young child’s brain. A variety of music can expand the sound world of the child, while developing musical enjoyment. Lamm and Schaefer (1995) ^[24] identify adults, older siblings, the mass media, and religious and educational institutions as agents that have noticeable impact on a child’s socialization, considered as significant elements of the child’s social environment. The emotions of children are strongly influenced by the responsiveness of the ‘caregiver’ during the first years of life. Thus, if the child’s joy is reflected by the caregiver and the emotion is reciprocated, the child’s security is strengthened. Children’s perceptions of objects in the environment, movement and print are expanded as they have opportunities for experiencing interesting visual images. In this paper, attention is focused on the immediate physical environment of the classroom and the neighbourhood of the sampled school. What this means is that a caring and responsive caregiver provides a positive climate for young children that will impact emotional security and many aspects of cognitive development. In this direction, children who feel secure and supported will experiment, try new things and express their ideas.

According to Lowenfeld and Brittain (1975, p. 4), one of the basic ingredients of a creative art experience in drawing is the relationship between the artist and his environment. They add that drawing is a constant process of assimilation and taking vast amount of information, mixing it up with the psychological self, and putting into a new form from the elements that seem to suit the aesthetic needs of the artist at the time.

Methodology

The methodology for the study was the qualitative inquiry approach based on case studies of three basic schools in three suburbs of Kumasi Metropolis in Ghana. And the instruments used in collecting the data were observation, interview and class exercises. Since the research called for a study and

analysis of existing visual representations among the children, the researcher found this research approach and data collection method of triangulation to be appropriate. Observation provides us with valuable information about individual children and a group of children. It helps us to monitor and understand their progress in different areas of development and also how they respond to different experiences (Driscoll, 2011; Fife, 2005) ^[9, 12].

An interview is mainly used to access a person’s experience(s) and perception(s), and feelings of reality. Based on the context of the situation, interviews can be grouped into three categories: structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, and unstructured interviews (Fontana & Frey, 2005) ^[14]. A structured interview has a set of regimented, predefined questions and the questions are asked in the same order for all respondents. This standardized format is designed to reduce the effects of losing focus on the problem being investigated. A semi-structured interview is more flexible and goes with an interview guide that has both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell and Alexander (1990) ^[25] define unstructured interview as an interview in which neither the question nor the answer categories are predetermined. Rather, they rely on social interaction between the researcher and the informant.

Punch (1998) ^[29] also describes unstructured interviews as a means to understand the complex behaviour of people without imposing any standardised categorization, which might limit the field of inquiry. Patton (2002) ^[27] describes unstructured interviews as a natural extension of participant observation, since they so often happen as part of ongoing participant observation in fieldwork. It is this type of interview that was used in the study of the children’s drawings.

The population under study was selected using the purpose sampling technique. This technique was considered appropriate because it illustrates or highlights what is typical or average about a group (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) ^[7]. It also illustrates characteristics of particular subgroups of interest and facilitates comparisons. According to Patton (2002) ^[27], purposive sampling is best used with small numbers of individuals/groups which may well be sufficient for understanding human perceptions, problems, needs, behaviours and contexts, which are the main justification for a qualitative study. In this study, the selection of sample schools was based on the researcher’s field experiences, knowledge of the identified communities, and the specific purpose of the study. The researcher therefore used the characteristics of the location of the school to determine the representativeness of each sample. Pupils’ selection for the study was done according to their capacity to represent ideas on paper. Those included in the study were Basic 2 to Basic 4 pupils whose ages ranged from eight to ten years.

Drawing Exercises

The nature of the study required the researcher to conduct drawing exercises in the Kumasi schools to obtain primary data. These exercises were done in three phases. The first phase was done in November 2004, the second in February 2005 and the third in May 2005. This was done to find out possible developmental changes in the children’s drawings. This strategy was also meant to assess the consistency with

which children present their drawings. The works of pupils from selected schools were the direct source of data. This demanded that the researcher spent much time in each of the schools, observe and collect pupils' works for analysis. Three visits were organised to each school for this purpose.

Thematic categorisation of drawing exercises

After going through the drawing exercises with the children, they were thematically organised for analysis. The following categories were used to analyse the data: *Spatial Treatment* (Placement of Drawings): This deals with the relative positions the images placed on the drawing sheet. See Appendix B. *Dominant Choice of Colour*: This refers to the widely used colour in the drawing. See Appendix A. *Figure Orientation*: It deals with the choice of male or female figure in the drawing. See Appendix B. *Themes*: This refers to the subject matter in the drawing.

Major Findings

Some of the major findings were that most of the children in all the schools showed enthusiasm to draw each time the researcher visited the schools. The children have a natural inclination for self expression and the drawings offered a means for the children to express their experiences. Also, it was realised that over-generalisation of drawings of children are not universally acceptable because environmental conditions can easily influence their drawings. From the study, it was observed that the use of purple was not prominent in all the schools studied, perhaps in a different country, purple may dominate. As such, there is the need to avoid the over-generalization of research findings conducted for children from different communities.

From the study, the dominant colour was red and other warm colours such as orange at Ayigya MA Primary and their large number (See Appendix A) in each class made it difficult at a point to get the attention of all the pupils. In fact, some were aggressive at picking the drawing materials supplied and calling for more. Perhaps, this might also be one of the effects of the populous nature of the area that was approximately 40,000 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2000)^[16] within which the school was situated in addition to the busy activities at Ayigya.

For Oforikrom Primary, the dominant colour used by the children was yellow. This implies that those groups of children that use the colour are likely to be enthusiastic and self-reliant than others of the same age (Amenowode, 2000). Studies into mood association with colour found that the intense yellow indicates feelings of vigour, loveliness and vitality (Terwogt & Hoeksma, 2001)^[32].

With regard to Asem Primary, the dominant colours were 'mixed' - no specific dominant colour, indicating mixed feelings of character traits that transcend vibrant activities through to the relatively calm or reserved (Terwogt & Hoeksma, 2001)^[32]. Since Asem Primary is closer to the Kumasi Central Business Area in Ghana, one would expect it to reflect in the drawings of the children. What was observed was that the children at Asem drew more human figure as compared with those from Ayigya and Oforikrom. This may be attributed to many teaching-learning materials that have figure illustrations in the classes which are seen most of the

time by the children and perhaps influenced by the busy/human traffic in the area.

It was also observed that most of the children would love to do a lot of drawing exercises when given the right atmosphere for which motivation plays a major role. Also, the children's drawings offered clues to their feelings, mood, behaviour, and personality traits. In addition, it was realised that drawing can be used to understand the expressive capabilities of children in different locations.

Two other striking observations from the study were that a pupil drew a figure without a nose and when questioned by the researcher, he declined to answer but the class teacher informed the researcher that the pupil was asthmatic, a medical condition he contended with. Also, a pupil decided not to take part in the drawing exercises during the first phase but later joined in the second and third phases. The class teacher stated that the pupils was reserved and that had been the situation over a period, but perhaps after sober reflection and motivation from seeing the works of her colleagues, she found an *outlet of liberation* to participate in the drawings in the next two phases.

Conclusions

The value of visual representations of children in the form of art works and especially drawings done in schools cannot be downplayed. They provide some guide and means of understanding the way children perceive the world and how the world around them affect them, particularly in what they draw. Children the world over have a natural inclination for self-expression. One way this self-expression can be exhibited is through drawing.

No child develops in a vacuum. All developments occur within a definite environment. Children are subjected to countless influences. They are affected by both nature (heredity) and nurture (environment). There are unusual or unexpected events that happen to most people, and when they do occur, they have a major impact on a person's life. Drawing is an aspect of expressive arts and expressive arts are beneficial to both the individual and society. Expressive arts provide content for literacy development. The arts not only provide important content but serve as a vehicle for developmental learning for children of all ages and abilities. Drawing offer important opportunities for expression, problem-solving, and social development.

Through participation in drawing activities, children of all abilities can make great strides in the processes of understanding and creating symbols and developing their own personal iconography, both of which are critical to communication and literacy development. Adults can help all children find ways to express their knowledge, feelings, and ideas through visual symbols and dramatic gestures.

It is suggested that teachers and curriculum developers must consider the environment of various communities within which the schools are situated when interacting with pupils in the classroom. Periodically, they need to survey of these communities in order to understand their physical, socio-cultural, economic and political aspects of life. The generalist philosophy of a teacher to all subjects in the class should be discarded to pave way for subject teachers for optimum results.

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