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## The factors influencing childrens' drawings

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### Abstract

Drawings are an important part of child's life. Children can describe their happiness, unhappiness, future dreams, past lives and continuing lives as they want through their drawings. The factors influencing children's drawings can be grouped under two main categories. They are; (1) the factors which are specific to child (species-specific readiness, maturation, age, intelligence, motivation, general state of arousal and anxiety, physiological state, prior experiences, individual differences, and child psychology) and (2) environmental factors (family, school, teacher, peer groups, socioeconomic and cultural status). Considering the fact that child's drawings are influenced from these inner and external factors and are crucial for child's life, the factors influencing children's drawings are investigated in detail and suggestions are made in this study.

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### 1. Introduction

Drawing is an important element of children's lives. Children can draw a variety type of pictures in accordance with their developmental levels and by using their creativity. Children's drawings are originated from their own lives and children's close friends, family, and teachers within their social environment can be the subject of these drawings. Children's drawings can give clues about their ongoing lives. The child's own characteristics alone are not enough to improve his drawings. Besides, child's own characteristics, his immediate environment (family, school, and teacher etc.) have also very positive influences in improving child's drawings. Drawing pictures improve child's ability of self expression on one hand and help him relax and be happy, on the other. Children's creativity need to be supported as required by their interests and developmental levels. Therefore, children's painting must be supported beginning from early childhood period.

Children paint through their creativity; also their family, school, environment and own selves constitute their inspirations. The activity of drawing helps children overcome distress and anxiety. It is a fact that the drawing child reflects his subconscious wishes and feelings, perception of outer world to his painting. The content of the painting reflects the previous experiences of child. The essence of child's pictorial expression is called "reflection" (Serin, 2003). It is possible to see that child's own life is influential on the process of drawing. A part of these influences is associated with the child's own physical and psychological development, while the others are environmental.

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Considering the fact that child's drawings are influenced by inner and external factors, this study focuses on the factors influencing the child's drawings in detail.

### 1.1. Child Specific Factors

Child-specific factors that are influential on child's drawing are species-specific readiness, maturation, age, intelligence, motivation, general state of stimulation and anxiety, physiological state, prior experiences, individual differences, and child psychology.

**Species-specific readiness:** To achieve the aimed behavior modification, a learning organism needs to be equipped with the necessary biologic features and this condition is called as "species-specific readiness". For instance, because human species are not equipped with the necessary biologic features, it is not possible to teach human how to fly. On the other hand, human has the ability of painting according to species-specific readiness theory (Güngör et al., 2002).

**Maturation:** Human or an organ is expected to achieve a certain level of competence in accordance with age. For instance, children are expected to have the sufficient level of finger muscle development that is necessary for drawing (Güngör et al., 2002; Ataman, 2004).

**Age:** A living organism needs to reach a certain age to learn specific types of behavior. For instance, the child's finger muscles must be developed enough to hold the pencil and write. This occurs approximately after age 5 (Güngör et al., 2002). Children have an urge to scribble on every flat surface up to age 3. Children around age 3 and 4 begin to name their scribbles. Their scribbles do not look like the real objects. The same scribble can be named as mother, father or another object. The time of 3-4-5 years old is called as "stick leg" period. Child draws ladder sketches before drawing stick legs. This is a preparation for drawing stick-legged people. 5 years old and after (up to 8-9 years old), the child experiences the "scheme period". Children in this period sense the difference between body and soul. This period is called as "child's realism". This is also called as "scheme drawings" or "meaningful drawings". Children begin to put initiatives to express their own feelings and thoughts around the age of 5-6. They can draw transparent images between the ages of 5 and 7 (İlhan, 1994). Children up to 4-5 years use all the colors in their pictures without making any separation between colors. Especially, naming of three primary colors occur around these years. The child does not care about the colors during the scribbling period; however, they begin to paint with colors beginning with the bright and clear ones around the ages of 4-5. Children's first colored drawings are composed of three main colors (yellow, blue, red). Around the age of 5, other colors are begun to be observed in child's drawings such as black, white, orange, green, and blue (San, 1979). Depending on child's age, there can be observable changes in child's drawings of human figure, home figure, tall buildings and trees. Through the age of seven, human body organs begin to take part in child's drawings. Children can also draw the head from the front view and side views (profile views). They form a unique perspective. There is also success in the making good use of paper spaces in pictorial compositions (Serin, 2003).

**Intelligence:** Learning, a certain type of behavior, requires reaching appropriate mental age. For instance, children need to have an average mental age of 6-6.5 in order to learn how to read and write (Güngör et al., 2002). According to Piaget, the images in mind can be revealed through drawings. That does not mean that all of the individuals have such ability. Every people cannot easily transfer the images in their minds to a piece of paper. These drawings will result in many short-cuts. The images of those who have weak memories rapidly moves away from certainty and the drawn object does not reflect the exact image. Piaget proposes a painting theory. Piaget describes drawing with "symbolic play" and "mental images". According to his view, drawings can be regarded as the reflections of mental images on papers. However, accurate drawings can not be done in the absence of a certain understanding of spatial mental images (Artut, 2004a; Yavuzer, 2007).

**Motivation:** Motivation rises as a result of the needs within the organism and stimulates the organism to action. For instance, the child's need of success motivates him to be the winner of a drawing contest. Stimuli can also motivate the child and he can be happy with the idea of receiving a prize at the end of the contest. Moreover, a child can be motivated with his routines and stick with the idea of "drawing pictures every morning". Interest in painting and willingness to spend time and effort to draw pictures are affective factors on child's painting. Happiness, enjoyment, willingness of creating something as a result of drawing pictures are the other factors that proves the child's inner motivation. The external motivation is provided by the prizes and reinforcers of the drawing contests which can also arranged in the classrooms (Güngör et al., 2002). All children have great pleasure from moving the trace objects (pencil, pastel, etc.) on a surface and drawing. These actions do not require a special kind of motivation and are the child's first encounters with art. The first shoulder-centered drawings are uncontrolled and are regarded

as the beginnings of the child's future pictorial (artistic) expression. This action begins to take place around one and a half year of age. Dot-matrix is the beginning of the very first lines of child's pictures, and then these basic lines are transformed into scribbling as a part of the natural process (Artut, 2004b).

**General state of arousal and anxiety:** Arousal level can be defined as the degree of receiving external stimuli. If the individual receives a very little amount of stimulation from the environment arousal level can be low. For instance, sleepiness, fatigue, and unwillingness can prevent child's painting. On the other hand, an individual receiving too much stimulus from the environment may have high levels of arousal. In this case, the individual have difficulties in focusing and learning due to high levels of excitement and anxiety. Experiencing excitement and anxiety cannot reflect the things that the children want to transfer through drawings. On the other hand, adequate levels of anxiety play incentive roles in child's drawings (Güngör et al., 2002).

**Physiological Status:** It is crucial for individuals to have a healthy physiological structure. Especially disorders of the sense organs (e.g., corruptions in vision and hearing, etc.), and chronic diseases (e.g., heart disease, diabetes, etc.) has negative impacts on the child's drawing ability (Güngör et al., 2002).

**Prior experiences:** Prior experiences have both generating and blocking effects on our lives. Prior experiences ease learning provided that they are supportive on novel learning. This is also called as "positive transfer". For instance, the children who receive early childhood education can be more successful in elementary school compared to his peers who do not receive early childhood education. However, previous learning may have detrimental effects on new learning in some cases which is called "negative transfer". For instance, an individual who learned to type with F keyboard cannot type with Q keyboard at the same speed. Therefore, art activities conducted in school need to form basis for future art activities and they need to make positive effects on the future painting activities (Güngör et al., 2002).

**Individual differences:** These differences between the same aged group children are observed especially due to the differences in mental capabilities. Children with normal levels of intelligence learn faster than the children with mental deficiencies (Ataman, 2004). A child with high levels of quantitative IQ score can do reasoning, grouping, sorting, and abstraction, think scientifically and easily calculate. However, a child with high levels of visual (spatial) IQ score learns by visualization, imagination, coloring, draws, paints, is sensitive to colors, shapes, and lines (Güngör et al., 2002). There can be variations in children's drawings for those of same age groups and different age groups. For instance, each child draws pictures of houses with unique properties. Sometimes they draw triangular roof and two windows, sometimes flat roofs and single-windowed houses. They never forget to include chimney and blackening smokes in their pictures (Oğuzkan et al., 2001; Artut, 2004a). Child's gender is another individual difference affecting children's drawings. For instance, girls prefer to use more colors in their drawings compared to boys. Some children persistently want to use warm colors (yellow, orange, red), and some of them are interested in using cold colors such as black, blue, green or brown (Serin, 2003).

**Child psychology:** Children may reveal their broken-hearted, jovial, aggressive feelings with their drawings. Child's own personality structure can be revealed through his pictures (İlhan, 1994; Atan, 2006). Drawings can be discharge tools for children who have compatibility problems between their inner and outer worlds. For instance, a child with a rich and deep world can not be forced to draw. Children can draw as long as they feel free and use creativity (Birsu 1984; Serin, 2003). The psychological status of the child is very important during the drawing process. For instance, a child with fear of going to school can draw his mother, father and himself in a closed room; a child who has impaired communication with his mother and father and is beaten by them, draws his father's beating hand little or does not draw it at all. The child can put distances between his father and himself in his drawings. He can attach some extensions to his father figure such as tails and long ears. A child who has negative feelings toward his brother and sister does not place them in his drawing or draws them poorly and awkwardly. It can be his declaration of himself in the family if he draws himself together with his father on the sofa and his mother serving coffee and tea to them (Serin, 2003). Through the child's drawings, it is possible to understand the time when the child becomes distanced from egocentrism and has feelings of being a member of larger groups (Yavuzer, 2007).

## 1.2. Environment

Environment is the total of the external stimuli that are effective on every human development stages beginning from fertilization. Below; the factors affecting children's pictures are provided including family, teachers, peer groups, socio-economic and cultural level, and education-related information.

**Family:** Democratic approach to child within the family is an important aspect of child's development throughout his lifespan. For instance, the authoritative figure in the family can be drawn by the child as heavier, majestic and big in his drawings (Güngör et al., 2002; Serin, 2003). A child who is exposed to negative parental attitudes can depict his parents with negative images in his drawings (Serin, 2003). The family must not provide the child with memorized drawings and paintings but provide him with the environment that is helpful on developing creativity and uniqueness. Families can provide the children with photos and pictures that are appropriate for their developmental levels so that children can examine them. Child's questions regarding artistic activities should not be left unanswered. Children have an urge about showing their paintings to their parents and teachers. These needs of children must be met by the adults. Adults should donate time and give support to children (Artut, 2004a). Adults should help in increasing child's self-confidence by respecting the child's drawings, being rewarding, and providing positive responses to them. In doing so, children can be more creative and do not think like "I can not do", "I am not capable of", but think like "I can make beautiful images", "My drawings are liked", therefore; their suppressed emotions and skills can be revealed. Any type of negative intervention and negative authority can result in children's shyness and timidity. Indeed, the stories written for children and cartoons are all fantastic. It is not appropriate to challenge children with sentences such as "Is it possible to have green hair?", "A human cannot be bigger than a house.", and "Can a fish live in the sky?" Children transfer their perceived worlds to the paper. Children cannot draw like adults and such an expectation is not right. A child who believes that he can not draw a cat or a tree needs to be supported so that he believes in "I can". Children draw cats and trees as their inner world guide them. Warnings such as "This does not look like a cat" or "This does not look like a tree" cause the child to have decreased levels of self-confidence. Children need to be provided with supportive environments so that they boost their self-confidence. Supportive environments do encourage children, increase their self-confidence, so that they love themselves and can be happy. They will be more creative and productive if they believe in their painting ability. It is an important fact that child's painting activity is process-oriented but not product-oriented (Demirci, 2008). **School:** Drawing and music activities in early childhood education aim the children to be happy by evoking their creative abilities. These activities are not compulsory or oppressing in nature and helps children relieve from stress. The content of the art activities in early childhood period also needs to be sensitive to children's developmental levels, interests, and needs. During early childhood education period, an art activity need to be offered as a composition of a few creative activities with ample spaces to work, appropriate tools and materials, sufficient time and need to be in line with the child's individual needs, abilities, and skills so that the child can make a choice on the activity he apt to work on. Provided that the required pre-conditions are fulfilled, the child will have the opportunity of using his creative power and paint. Early childhood education provides children with a variety of materials such as crayons, watercolors, pastel colors, soft dark black pencils, various papers, and drawing boards and allows children draw as they want (Birsu, 1984). Early childhood education centers provide appropriately prepared paints, crayons, and chalk points that are suitable for young children to draw (Yıldız and Şener, 2003). Early childhood education provides the appropriate conditions for young children to gain artistic skills and knowledge and these conditions may not be provided by families (Artut, 2004a, Artut 2006). **Teacher:** An art teacher need to be knowledgeable about the children's lives and behaviors, feelings and thoughts, their maturation stages, various aspects of the environment that can be effective on their lives (İlhan, 1994). Teachers need to attach great importance to stimulus richness and provide free environments for free painting activities. Teachers should accept that painting activities can turn the classroom into a messy environment and a little bit of messy is okay. The teacher's ongoing questions such as "What is this?" and "What are you doing?" cause children not to express their feelings and thoughts easily. On the other hand, statements such as "I liked your picture so much, how a happy girl you are drawing." and "You are using yellow and blue colors very nicely." encourage children. Providing children with the adult-prepared paintings can interfere with the child's development and limits their creativity. A child in the scribbling period must not be countered with statements such as "Stop scribbling and make a nice picture" or questions such as "Why don't you draw a beautiful cat?" Such questions will indeed impede the child's self-confidence and healthy development. Statements such as "Let's draw a picture together" can also has detrimental effects on child. The teacher needs to have a sensitive approach toward children's paintings so that he does not restrain their creativity and self-confidence. Such negative approaches can also result in discipline problems in the classroom (Oğuzkan et al., 2001). **Peer groups:** Children tend to imitate their peers' behaviors. For instance, a young child in the early childhood education period may not want to draw a picture or have negative attitudes about drawing pictures by imitating his friend who is not interested in drawing pictures (Güngör et al., 2002). A four-year-old boy who draw a picture and his peers around them can all have the same emotional impact and shared enjoyment (Artut, 2004a). **Socio-economic and cultural level:** If a child has success in drawing and wants to get a job related

to drawing profession, a family with high socio-economic levels can direct him to an art school and provide all the necessary materials that are required for his painting training. Insufficient economic resources impair the child's motivation and ability of painting (Güngör et al., 2002). Children from different cultures and families may have differences in their pictorial expression and color preferences as well. They can show differences in choosing their subjects and colors for painting in accordance with their pre-learned knowledge. For instance, the legends, stories and tales told in the family can be reflected in children's picture (Güvenç, 2005).

## 2. Conclusion and Recommendation

Children begin to be interested in painting beginning from the early childhood period. Children's creativity needs to be supported in terms of their interests and development. Child's own individual characteristics alone may not be enough for the development of painting skills. Besides the child's own individual characteristics, environment (family, teachers etc.) is also very positive on child's painting. Therefore, it is crucial to support children about painting which is a part of art in all life stages. Considering the fact that children's drawings are originated from their own lives, children need to be guided in the best ways. In line with this conclusion, below are the recommendations for educators, families and professionals working in this area:

- Parents and early childhood educators can support the children about thinking creatively, making creative comments, using creativity without using copy models, and children's abilities of drawing on their owns.
- Educators can be good guiders supporting the children's painting in appropriate ways and provide them with the free-trial opportunities.
- Mothers, fathers, and teachers can provide the painting materials in the living areas of children so that the children can paint when they want to.
- Mainly mothers, fathers, and teachers, and other experts working in this field can motivate the children about drawing by praising them with nice words about their paintings.
- The relevant institutions of state can constitute art education centers to encourage the children to involve in art activities out of formal schooling and can provide fundings for children to make professional use of their painting abilities.

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